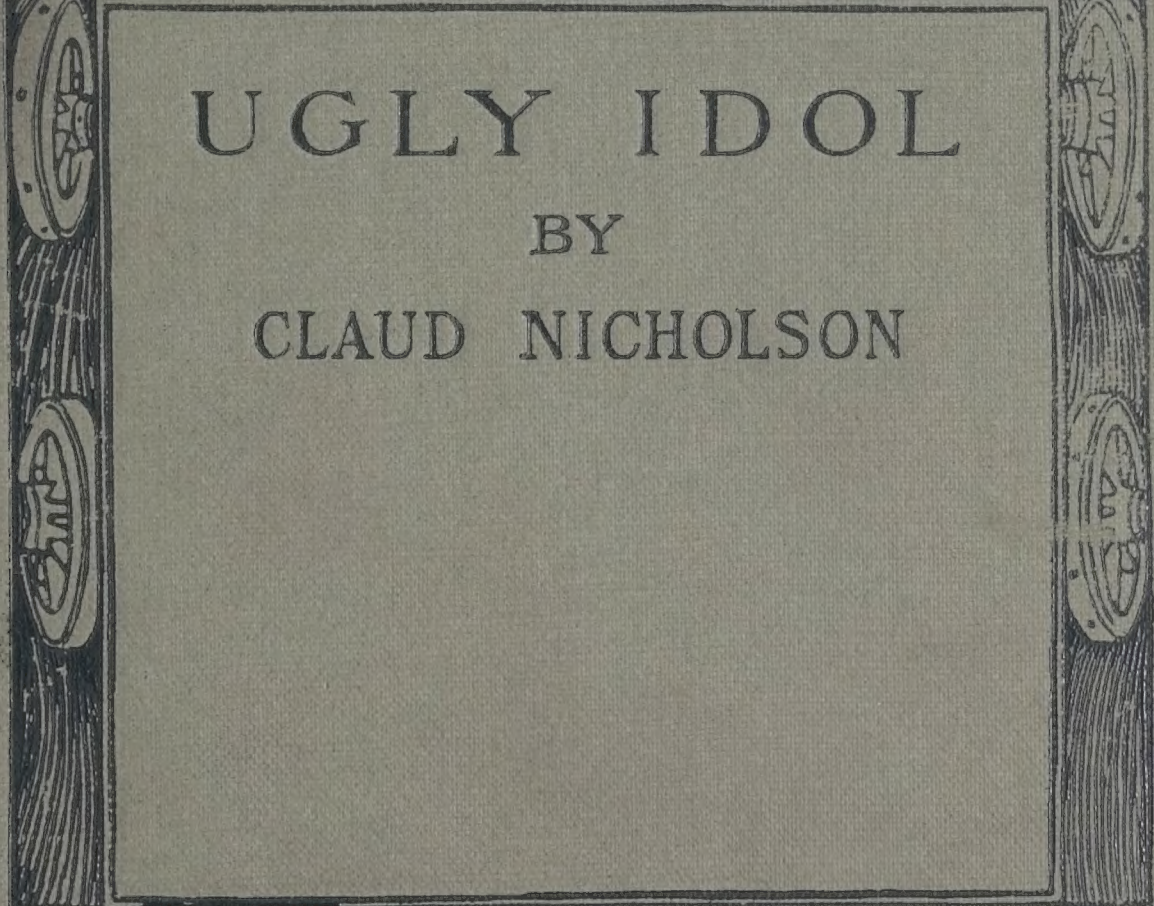




UGLY IDOL

BY

CLAUD NICHOLSON



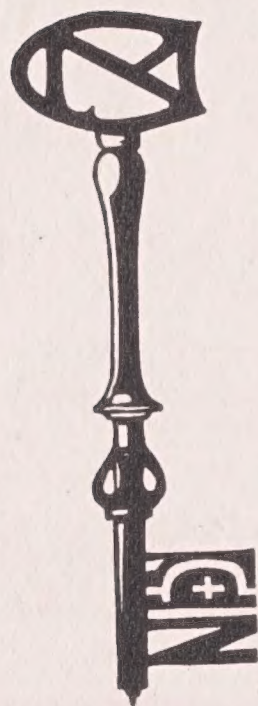
P.W.

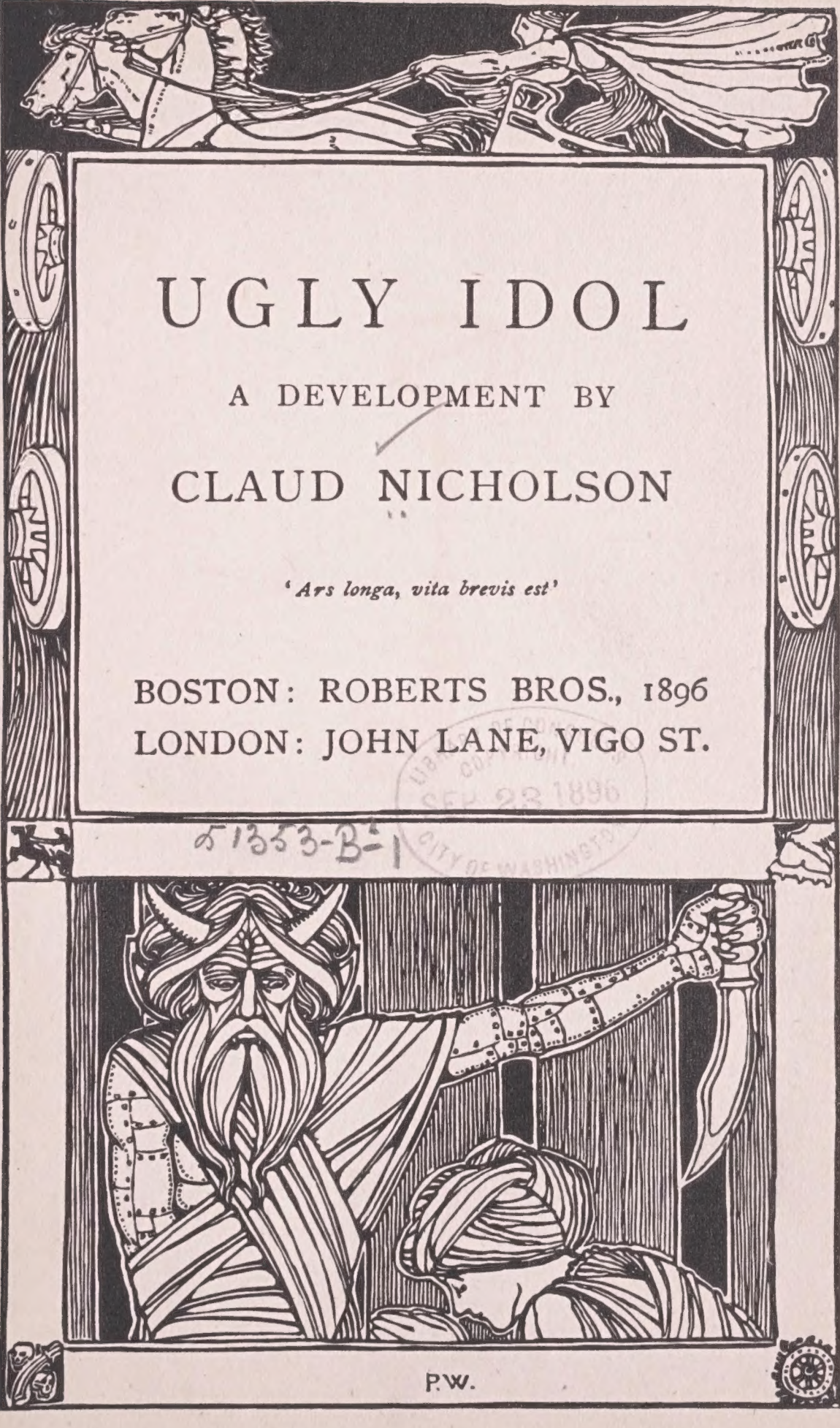
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. 35 Copyright No.

Shelf PZ3
.N521U

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





UGLY IDOL

A DEVELOPMENT BY
CLAUD NICHOLSON

'Ars longa, vita brevis est'

BOSTON: ROBERTS BROS., 1896
LONDON: JOHN LANE, VIGO ST.

51353-B-1

SEP 23 1896

CITY OF WASHINGTON



P.W.

PZ3
N521U

Copyright, 1896,
BY ROBERTS BROTHERS.

All Rights Reserved.

University Press:
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

TO
MY MOTHER



CHAPTER I

THIS was the thoroughfare that Gilbert had passed along for some years every morning and evening; yes, this was it, teeming with life; — not the politest.

The lights of all kinds of vehicles joggled, flashed, flared backwards and forwards behind the thin curtain of the fog, and broad quivering patches of light from the shop-windows lay on the pavement. Lamps fringing the streets twinkled away in all directions; everywhere there were cross reflections, a medley, a turmoil of shifting lights.

A world of clerks, peopling the darkness with red cigar-tips, chattered and giggled in the ecstasy of the young life that wakes with the closing of office hours: costers on business and pleasure, children with big baskets or broken mugs; thin, white-faced girls with small, very small bundles of work; and other women with no work at all, but open red lips agape over glistening teeth, jostled each other on the crowded pavement.

Gilbert swung along mechanically, engrossed in his own thoughts, a bad habit that had grown on him recently, and he no longer noticed what passed on either side of him; with the callousness

of habit he walked every day upon the pavement he had so hated, a while ago. Yet this crowd, coarse, roaring, pushing, swearing, repulsed him still when he awoke to its reality; sometimes he smelt the hot air from restaurants, the odors of tobacco and strong wine, and heard anew the excited voices and suggestive giggles from within, and turned aside shuddering. And yet, he thought bitterly, the people that passed him were miserable, like himself; one, here and there, — that shivering woman, clutching at her meagre black shawl with a bruised hand — even tragic; others — that tipsy man, guided by a female urchin in laceless boots — absurd. Or was the woman in the black shawl, with her dirty face, her straining, gazing eyes, her bleeding fingers, amusing also? No doubt.

Some six years since, he had torn down here, assailed with that need of action — action, that comes on a man in the height of passion; and six months ago, vaguely aware of the throbbing life that hustled past him, and swept along the steaming pavement, he had stridden again, in such a fine fresh anger as comes to us only once in fifty years; that storms and swirls about the roots of our being like some flooded river that tears up trees in its herculean fury.

All this, of course, had ended in nothing particular; his passions generally did.

Just now, engrossed in his own thoughts, and far away in very flowery fields, he knocked by chance against a woman, who seized him by the arm and told him with a loud laugh ‘to clear out

of the w'y of lydies.' He became conscious of others of her kind round about, and fled in horror. Vile street! he had known it so long, and it never ceased to repulse him; he looked round him with a new shiver of disgust. He was not of the kind who become hardened to things they do not like, nor yet of those who stand by and mark with idle observance all the filth the gutter washes past them; his one defence was the garment of dreams he tried to wrap about him. He was an unfortunate person with ideals; *ideals*, these ice-creams of things of which boys take a farthing lick before they discover how they are made and how soon they melt. Then instead of doing as sensible people do, and discarding them for something more solid, Gilbert stuck to his poor ices: they were not very nourishing.

A swish of swing doors, a sudden roar of voices and a gust of bad odors reminded him that he was near the public-house at the corner. A barman came to the door with a half-empty pot in his hand, and asked briskly of a respectable woman outside what she wanted. Gilbert did not hear her reply, being too pre-occupied, but his ear caught a burst of uproarious mirth, the splash of the fluid from the pot and 'Ere's a kiss from me, ducky.'

He grinned sardonically to himself as he turned away into a dark silent row of dwelling-houses; this very thing had happened to him in polite society a few months ago. He had overheard Graham, whispering so very wittily, his abomin-

able dregs of scandal; he had splashed and stained Gilbert to the best of his ability; more politely than the barman perhaps, but with the same intention.

After all, he thought, there was nothing nice in life, and why was one so desperately anxious to live? Why did he, himself, love his life so much! And then he smiled, for he loved Agatha, and she was life to him. Why was it a sin for him to love her, when it was no sin for her to love Lester? Ah, pah! he threw away the end of his cigarette; he was going home, to his wife, yes, he had a wife, and he had married for money. He said this plainly, for he enjoyed being cruel to himself sometimes, and wilfully ignored the fact that he had after all the best of the bargain. As he took out his latch-key, he thought mockingly of the many resolutions he had formed on that night when he had gone to Agatha, and had paced up and down outside the front-door. He had resolved to be the dummy of others no longer; he would not give up all that was dearest to him in accordance with his father's arrangements; he, with his artist nature, ambitious, restless, — and clerk at Stanley's, — he would go to her to-morrow, would enforce her attention, would cry to her that he loved her, had loved her for many long months. All these things he had resolved, — outside the front door.

He was a strong-willed man, but his will manacled his own hands; a passionate man, but life had been hard to him, and the fool had never dared to show his passion in daylight. On

a foggy night, freshly roused and insulted, he could scheme earnestly the downfall of the world: in the morning he was a clerk, trudged forth to the office, and had other things to do. With that prickly sensitiveness, so annoying to other people, he was afraid on the morrow to hurt his own tender soul or hers.

He turned his key in the door, and on entering was met with a pleasant warmth, an appetizing smell of dinner, and his wife.

‘Are not you rather late? I wish you would try to be more punctual — it upsets the servants,’ she said, in that extremely good-natured way she had of saying everything, and that took the sting from any reproach. Then she waited beside him, with round eyes and open mouth, expecting a caress. She was accustomed to an affectionate brother who hugged her and tom-boyed about her with an unceremonious and apparent love that suited her simple mind; but this was not Gilbert’s way, and he was quite unconscious of her disappointment, and the blank he left when he hurried into the study to look for the evening post, without a word of welcome or affection.

At dinner, with his eyes glancing side-wards at the letters beside his plate, he asked what she had been doing during the day, and received in reply a little flood of news.

‘I saw father’s new coffee-house in Portal Lane; I hope it will do as well as the others. I managed to get the paint to-day for the mission-room texts, and Miss Spears has started a sewing-club that

I looked in upon; but I am already so busy for the Sisters' Bazaar that I did not undertake any more work. I am afraid Sister Frances Secunda is passing away,' she added, in the unctuous tone she had learned from hearing her mother preach in the mission-rooms. 'But one must thank the Lord for deliverance in her case, poor *dear saintly* creature.'

This was only laughable in Ella, while it was objectionable in her mother. It was odd, perhaps, to hear this big, buxom woman, with her ruddy face, big mouth, evident teeth, bespattering her conversation with sudden religious reference as other people use slang. She had grown up in an atmosphere of religion, which was somewhat mixed in her mind by reason of having her mother's Salvation Army tendencies on one hand, and her aunt's Anglican Sisterhood principles on the other. She busied herself with all these things as a matter of course, and without any particular thought. It troubled her a little after her marriage when she found that Gilbert was much too busy to go to any but very exceptional bazaars, and even her mother could only persuade him to attend one of the very charming prayer-meetings that were given in the drawing-room once a fortnight. And Ella suspected that the presence of the German ambassador and Mrs. Budd had accounted for his compliance. But she had an equable nature; she preferred sewing to those meetings, and did not regret the circumstance much.

Her marriage had not made any great change in her life. She saw very little of her husband, and continued to district-visit and to receive the same circle of friends as before. She lived in much less opulence, of course, than at home; but the house was her own and she mistress of it; the wife of a man poor, but with expectations. She loved Gilbert, and saw him in the evenings and on Sundays. In those circumstances there was no reason why she should not be happy.

Once he had taken her to see some very odd friends of his. He had known one, whom he called 'Theresa,' all his life, he told her, and she liked her better than some of the people she saw there, who behaved in a very queer manner, it seemed to her, and she owned frankly that she did not care for them. Gilbert smiled.

'Very well,' he said, 'I will not press you to know them. I dare say they will not trouble you much.'

Since that she had, in her simple way, tried to make him drop them. She distrusted them.

'Where have you been?' — 'Why are you so late?' — 'Are you going out?' — 'You won't be long, dear,' — all those little questions conveyed to him that 'they' were absorbing too much of his attention. He invariably had a crisp answer ready, invariably did what he intended to do, and his calmness baffled his loving wife.

But they got on very well together, and looked very comfortable sitting opposite each other at dinner, in their neat little dining-room.

‘O Gilbert,’ Ella went on, ‘I saw that Miss Humberston to-day. Is n’t she an artist, or something of that kind? Of course Uncle Lawrence is an artist, but he never comes to the house now. He was really very nice, but I am afraid that he was lost to the ways of righteousness. Oh, I looked for that sock this morning in the bedroom, but I had not time to mend it, or your coat. Do you see this lovely fern I got to-day?’

So she chattered on, an endless flow of small-talk, which is generally interesting to a husband who has been away all day, and likes to hear of what has happened during his absence. And Ella was a person who made home bright. Big as she was, she had a certain school-girlish *gaucherie* of movement that gave one an impression of youthfulness, not elegant, but frank and wholesome. Her face had a freshness about it, too, that atoned in the eyes of some for its plainness and air of astonished simplicity; her odd, loud laugh was startling; her heavy footsteps and manner of banging doors also; but these habits gave a taste of life to the dull house. She had an eye for decoration, and was at present painting the drawing-room chimney-piece in a bold design, free enough in touch to be artistic — unexpectedly so, for nothing in her appearance led one to expect such real taste and ability.

‘Come and see,’ she cried to Gilbert, bouncing from the table and running upstairs on the impulse. She continued at the pitch of her voice from the landing:

‘It’s not quite dry. I am afraid the dust is sticking to it. Just call to Mary to bring me a cloth. Mary! a cover, please,’ and after all she ran down to get it herself.

‘Yes,’ said Gilbert, suddenly conscious that he had not spoken much since he came home. ‘Really pretty, my dear, and very well done. After all, you are quite an artist, Ella.’ He put his arm through hers.

‘I’m glad you like it,’ she said simply. ‘Your judgment counts for so much. I wish you would draw the design for the door.’ Then she laughed — ‘gaffawed’ her father called it. ‘Mrs. Leighs called just when I was busy at it, and she looked rather shocked. Of course I used to do most things in the boys’ photography room at home after they gave up using it. When she turned round to say good-bye, she swept the whole of this poppy off, and I had a great business in getting the paint from her dress.’

‘You should n’t have told her it was there.’

‘Oh,’ said Ella, to whom this had never occurred, ‘I could not have let her go with it like that. She is such a very good person, Gilbert, so charitable, and has brought the Bible and the name of the Lord to many poor boys for the first time. She will never forgive me. I am afraid she thinks I am not as good as I should be, and,’ she added meditatively, ‘it was such a handsome dress, too — silk — and it must have been very expensive.’

Gilbert laughed. ‘The cause of her anger, I dare say. If it had happened to any one else, she

would have exhorted them to bear it patiently. Never mind her. She is not worth bothering about.'

Ella opened wide her mouth. This was entirely against the principles to which she had been educated, and it astonished her that her husband should be such a good man without doing any of the things she looked upon as necessary to goodness. So, without replying, she dropped the subject, and reverted again to the chimney-piece.

'Don't you think a bee or something there would be a great improvement — a blue butterfly would look very well?'

Gilbert's arm stiffened and he frowned painfully.

'No,' he said quickly. 'I'd put a white one, or a brown one, or — any color but blue. Put a bee.'

He retreated from her, and she was astonished to observe the veins swell on his brow as they did when he was put out. What had she said to disturb him? She began to wind some wool, and having, of course, no idea of silence, she asked, in the act of dividing a skein, why he was cross. Was he tired? Why did he not take his medicine if he had a headache?

Gilbert, exasperated, was turning his head to answer, when he saw something black with the corner of his eye, and he bounded from his chair, glad that an excuse offered itself on which he could expend his irritation.

'That damned cat in the drawing-room again!' he shouted, and the beast, recognizing its enemy, fled through the door incontinently.

‘O Gilbert, I wish you were fonder of cats! But I did tell the servants to keep it in the kitchen,’ Ella said with a sigh. She looked so good as she said this, and it was so kind of her to give up her own liking for the animal to his dislike of it, that Gilbert sat down again, conscience-stricken, determined to be pleasant for the rest of the evening. Just then his dog came in, a big, handsome fellow, wriggling all over with happy recognition of his master.

‘Here you are,’ he said with his laughing mouth. ‘Glad to see you. Had a good dinner? So have I.’ He sat down between Gilbert’s knees.

‘Well, old boy, what devilry have you been up to to-day? I see a satisfaction and repletion in your eye that bodes ill.’

‘No,’ said Ella, ‘I don’t think he has done anything to-day.’

‘You are getting that all in a mess. Let me hold it for you,’ and Gilbert sat patiently for half an hour while his wife disentangled the skein. She chattered and laughed. Ah! this good Ella; life would surely never be very unkind to her.

So they sat close together before the fire, the dog snoring peacefully on the hearthrug beside them. This is how things should be after a few months of marriage.

‘A little blue butterfly’ had got into Gilbert’s head, and as he went upstairs when Ella had gone to her room, he said again and again to himself, ‘*Petit papillon bleu, p’tit papillon bleu.*’

He loitered down the passage to his father's room. Inside here was all that he knew of happiness, and sometimes it too turned to sorrow; a bitter grief swept over him when his father forgot to love him, and he had grown to dread the look in those eyes, the look that came and went. It was curious to see this neat, precise man standing thus, his hair almost singed by the gas jet, his face drooping, thinking of a little blue butterfly and a golden head in the sunshine.

Ella suddenly burst open her door, and issued forth in search of matches.

'If you were tidier, and kept things in one place, you would know where to find them,' said her husband tartly.

There could be no doubt that Gilbert was developing into a martinet. He went in hurriedly to see his father.

Mr. Strode was sitting in his big armchair beside the fire, and the light shone brightly on his silver ringlets. He was busy dictating something to Martha, an arduous task for both. He could no longer write well with his trembling hand, and Martha, of course, had never written well, and poetry, above other things, she found difficult to comprehend. Mr. Strode ruffled his curls with one hand, with the other motioned Gilbert to be silent, and Martha crumpled her rugged brow painfully.

'Now, did you put "when" on the next line? Bless me, make haste, what's the matter now? I must get a secretary, Gilbert, I have said that

over and over again. How often do you intend to forget? You forget me altogether, you never do a thing I ask you! I *must* have a secretary: it is of the greatest importance that my book should come out; and I suppose you have not seen about it yet? I believe you would like to starve me; you don't remember that it's owing to me that you are better off. Martha, is that a blot I see? Blotting-paper, quick, — must copy it out again — how careless you are!' He gazed about him irately.

'Put it away in the drawer, and the pen: shut the ink-pot: now hand me that book, no, that one. Now, Gilbert, listen to this.'

Mr. Strode's eyesight was no longer very good: but he thought the fault lay in his spectacles: he took them off and wiped them, tried them this way and that, and at last burst out:

'I must speak to the doctor to-morrow, that man in the shop cheated me, and when I wrote to him, answered me impertinently. You must get me a new pair, — now don't forget.' He fidgeted in his chair, and his ringlets hung in a quivering halo round his face. Old face, aged by illness, with an odd vagueness on it, in spite of its irascibility. Ah! this vagueness, Gilbert watched it growing every day. Beautiful face, with its faultless outline, its little cross smile only wiped out now and then by that flickering confusion that came and went.

Gilbert knelt down at the side of the chair, and took up the manuscript with a smile.

‘Let us go on from where we left off last night,’ he said, and began to read.

Mr. Strode listened, and a pleased smile soon superseded his frown.

‘Ah! what do you think of that? Hush, more slowly, — now — what, a word left out?’ so he commented as Gilbert read, marking time on his son’s shoulder. Gilbert also seemed interested, and turned with a bright smile when he laid the manuscript back on the table.

‘We must make haste and get it finished; but a secretary would be a nuisance; he would not know your ways, you see, and we could not trust him. I will write it out properly, eh, how will that do?’

‘Well, it might be better. But be sure you make no mistakes. Do so many pages, and bring it to me to correct every day.’ Mr. Strode seemed to think that his son was still a little boy, and Gilbert did not mind, he enjoyed it. Mr. Strode was about to speak again, when a sudden expressionlessness came over his face, and he paused.

‘Er, what was I saying?’ he murmured.

‘About this,’ said Gilbert anxiously. ‘Look, I shall begin here, do you see?’ He laid his hand on his father’s. ‘You will let me do it?’

‘Yes, yes, my boy, of course. Now, observe how busy your old father is, he has done something else to-day!’

‘Really? Yes, you are always at something, but don’t work too hard.’

‘Aha!’ cried Mr. Strode merrily, ‘I always

was busy. I could not live without something to do. . . . Just lend me a hand.'

He rose from his chair with difficulty, and Gilbert guided him, holding him firmly and gently by the arm. Martha, entering at that moment with her master's supper, watched with a sad eye Mr. Strode carefully feeling for each step, his eager face bent forward, clinging tightly to the protecting hand of his son, Gilbert, as watchful, as careful, peering down through his glasses at every obstacle.

'Can't think what makes me so shaky,' grumbled his father. 'Never used to be like this. The piano stool, — careful — yes, that's it. I composed the music for the *chanson* to-day. You are surprised, aren't you?' his merry laughter rang through the room. 'I thought you would be, — but what's that? Martha, don't make such a noise, and put that down in the fender, to keep warm. Gilbert, just see that the ashes don't fall into it.' Gilbert placed the cup carefully, and returned, and then Mr. Strode lifted a dainty hand with a movement suggestive of lace-ruffle, and began to play with his tremulous fingers upon the piano. His head went to the music, he sang a word or two, and Gilbert, at his bidding, manœuvred the pedals. Martha stood at the table, still watching them as they sat side by side at the piano, producing a music that was worth listening to, for Mr. Strode never did anything that was not worth listening to or looking at. Every one acknowledged his genius.

‘There, you see, are the birds, — hush, softly, remember it is early morning, — tree-tops just gilded with the first rays of the sun, everything else gray and misty, covers not taken off yet, you know, birds waking, that’s the stream, go on, louder ——’

Gilbert approached his short-sighted eyes closer to the ill-written music, a proud smile upon his face the while. If some one only heard these compositions of his father’s! When they finished, Mr. Strode turned to his son with a smile.

‘Charming, is n’t it?’ he said simply. ‘It is a long time since we had a table-cloth opera ——’

‘Yes,’ answered Gilbert quickly. ‘Let us have one to-night,’ and he busied himself about it, pleased to see his father so happy and untroubled. A folded cloth was laid on the keyboard, and Mr. Strode played thereon without any hesitation, never making a fault. It gave an odd, faraway sound that was effective.

‘This is the angry father,’ said Mr. Strode, with an appreciative smile on his lips. ‘Now this is the daughter pleading.’

‘Now she runs off with the hero,’ put in Gilbert.

‘Precisely, and meets with a misadventure, — these agitated chromatics.’

So they laughed together over the piano, to the wonderment of the old servant behind them, and Mr. Strode was very happy.

A big cinder, sparkling suddenly from the fire, fell with a great fizzing into the cup that had been put there to keep hot.

Mr. Strode jumped from the stool nervously,

and would have fallen if Gilbert had not held him safely.

‘What do you mean by putting it there?’ he burst out. ‘Your carelessness as usual, Gilbert. I never knew a more handless, clumsy boy, — you spoil everything, tear everything you don’t break, especially my things. I believe you do it on purpose. Leave go, you will make me fall if you hold me, leave go at once! You upset my nerves completely, when I have done everything for you too! I shall tell the doctor how I am treated!’

He called Martha to aid him to his chair, and he would not turn to speak again to Gilbert.

‘Take him away, he does it on purpose, he takes advantage of this rheumatism I have in my legs. He declares I’m ill.’

‘I know it’s only rheumatism,’ he grumbled to Martha, who said, yes, it was very annoying.

‘Get out of my sight,’ he added, when Gilbert tried to approach him, and did not settle down until his son was out of the room. The loving look died from his eyes, and turned to suspicion and mistrust; he was certain that every one in the house plotted against him; he was kept shut up and told he was ill because he was in the way, — oh, he knew all about it, his observation did not go for nothing, — he said; he saw, he would pay them out yet.

Gilbert went down to his study with the manuscript he was to copy out in his hand. He gazed at it a long while, and sighed over it miserably. Then he set to work upon it, but the pen twirled

aimlessly in his fingers, and only a big blot fell on the paper.

He sprang from his chair, his veins all throbbing: he strode up and down the room; what was the matter with him, — what was he going to do?

Nothing, he was only wretched; miserable. But so many people are miserable.

‘Dog! Is that you?’ said Gilbert, returning to his chair, and becoming aware of a moist black thing, a sniffing, muzzly affectionate nose at his elbow. He embraced the beast with the silly effusion that comes of sitting up late at night, and meditating in solitude over the littleness of life, the coldness and dirtiness of the Thames.

‘Doggy!’ said Gilbert, with his cheek against a soft ear, ‘dear old dog.’

Dolphin wagged his tail sleepily. This indifference offended Gilbert, and he said, ‘Cats!’ to arouse his uncaring companion. Dolphin at once bristled and every hair asked, ‘Where!’ ‘You are a selfish brute, too, you — no, don’t look at me like that, I did n’t say anything.’ Then he laughed and then his head dropped on the table.

In this house everything was quiet, with the heavy full silence of sleeping night. Upstairs, Ella slept the deep, sound sleep of a healthy child. Mr. Strode dreamed of his manuscript, a little pleased smile on his beautiful face. Downstairs, Dolphin snored peacefully, his nose between two big paws, — Gilbert, his head on the table, cried, cried . . . to the tune of ‘*Petit papillon bleu, petit papillon bleu.*’ Ah, ah! *p’tit papillon bleu.*

CHAPTER II

EVERYWHERE was heat, — heat. A still haze lay over the Campagne Salève, a great, glowing yellowness glared on its white walls and the dusty road outside, lay in a big sweep on the lawn in front, scintillated in ridges of light on the surface of the lake. The shadow under the trees was very blue, the mountains in the distance very purple, but a brazen sun poured its gorgeous heat upon the world, and things ached and quivered with excess of color. The air was pregnant with the buzz of insects, and butterflies swung daintily on the tendrils of the vines, and the wasps quarrelled among the fruit trees.

Spahi was stretched out on the stones in the courtyard, guarding the big iron gate as usual, snapping at flies, and panting, a long pink tongue dangling from the corner of his black mouth. Through the gate one saw the clustering roofs of the old town, the glittering water of the lake, and a ribbon of dusty road, leading thither. Jeanette's white cap bobbed up and down on the roof under the awning, and one could hear her humming and singing to herself as she sewed. Then she entered into conversation with a man in a cart who drew up with a prolonged '*Brrrrrré*'

outside the gate. At this, Philomène, who, like Jeannette, was French, clattered over the stones in her little glazed sabots, her red stockings peeping out at every step.

Ah! picturesque Philomene, whose red stockings blazed in that sunshine!

When the cart rumbled away she pottered back to the house with a great basket on her hip.

*‘ Mais, vous n’aurez pas Pier-re,
Tron, tron, tron, tron, bri, bri, bri, bri-ô,
Mais vous n’aurez pas Pier-re — ’*

sang Jeannette on the roof-top under the awning.

The children’s voices were audible in the distance; they were as usual in the little wood fringing the high banks of the Rhone. But, very often, Gilbert was there alone, under the trees; he watched the sunlight dancing now here, now there, on the restless leaves that were never, even on the hottest day, quite still. There was always a little flippant flutter among them, and he wondered what their chattering was all about. And what a fragrance there was in the air! he never forgot it, that pervading aroma of roses and orange-trees, of new-mown hay that was almost all flowers, of currants and apples that came from the orchard. He lay and dreamt all the long summer day on the edge of the river bank. Down below, it sneaked past, that river, with the fast slyness of waters that carry with them the secrets of cities; but it had also the rapid, rippling, onward gait it had learned in the mountains, and only pro-

priety caused it to slacken and slip along oozily as it neared the town. Just above where Gilbert lay, the Arne joined it, white with the snow of the hills, leaping and bounding tumultuously, a savage with the mystery of black rockways largely writ on him. Gilbert watched the Rhone, blue and deep-bedded, the Arne, milky with snow, shifting along uneasily side by side. And there was a multitude of flowers about the banks, all colors, all shapes, opening wide mouths to the busy brown gentlemen that buzzed far and wide with such official importance. 'Tickets, please!' it seemed to him the bees said, every time they alighted on the meek geraniums. There were butterflies that swung airily on the tips of petals, and very busy little spiders, irate, fussy little beggars, altogether colonel-like in their behavior. The big flies would settle upon his hands to perform their toilets, with the conceited self-content common to them. They wrapped their heads in two springy fore-legs, they smoothed their wings with two other legs, and then they wrung them all in couples as a man does when he washes his hands.

Or else, he was not alone on the bank, but Theresa would be there, spending her summer holidays at the Campagne in order to learn French, and she spoke English so that Gilbert should not forget it. Lester stayed at home, for no one but Theresa or his mother knew how to manage him in those days, so she came alone. Agatha was there very often also, because she lived a mile or two up the road, and came every

week with her mother, who talked to Clothilde the whole afternoon on these occasions, or more often with Mr. Strode in the studio.

Even then Theresa was a shrivelled person with no pretence to beauty, whereas Agatha was fair and soft, with poetic eyes that peered shyly on the world under their long lashes. Her dolls were great people, queens and princes, the tangible embodiments of a wonderful romance that occupied her complete attention.

She sat now, with her back against a tree, surrounded by sundry limp or very stiff dolls, that extended their arms with the beaming effusiveness or lay in the drunkly sentimental attitudes peculiar to persons of their construction. Ah well! those sad dollies have been shut up now in a cupboard, side by side with other relics, and much sunshine has been locked away in their flaxen hair. Agatha dreamy-eyed has fingered musty morsels of silk — oh, it was nice when there were dolls in the world, and Monsieur Polichinelle clapped his hands in one's face and shook his humps merrily.

Ah! Monsieur Po! —

Ah! Monsieur Li! —

Ah! Monsieur Chi! —

Ah! Monsieur Nelle! —

Ah! M. Polichi — polichinelle! —

Ah! M. Polichinelle! —

where are you now?

Gilbert had possessed himself of a doll, and was watching its waxen tears, produced by the sun, with great satisfaction.

‘It’s a pity,’ soliloquized Agatha, ‘that Prince Charlie has n’t got any braces to his drawers. Men always have them. Have yours got braces, Bertie?’

‘No.’

‘Oh,’ said Agatha, with great disappointment, ‘then you are n’t a man.’

‘I am a man,’ he shouted angrily. ‘Father does n’t wear them, and look how strong I am!’ with that he stuck his fist slap against her chest and made her cough. She did not cry, but was about to apologize, when Theresa, fearing a quarrel, called out sharply,

‘Oh, do take care, or the sawdust’ll come out.’

‘She’s not made of sawdust,’ said Gilbert, already smiling an ingratiating smile, that saved him many punishments. He smiled most when in disgrace, and had an air of being furtively proud of his sins that delighted Mr. Strode.

‘I know,’ answered Theresa, who, as usual, had spoken first and thought after. ‘But something would have happened.’

‘I say, Piggie, this doll is crying,’ was his next remark.

‘Oh, that’s Victoria Jane: she dies young. I made it that way because she always did look sad.’

‘It’s because you stuff her every morning with bread and milk, and it goes sour,’ said Theresa meditatively.

‘No, — but look — how jolly! — they’re rolling down her cheeks.’

‘ Oh, you are a horrid thing ! I ’ll never forgive you, — never. She ’s melting ! ’

Agatha sobbed, and Gilbert looked a little contrite, still watching Victoria Jane’s dolorous face with the corner of his eye and secret satisfaction.

‘ You can make it consumption,’ suggested Theresa.

‘ What ’s that ? ’

‘ Oh, something you die of slowly,’ she explained vaguely.

This satisfied Agatha, and Gilbert, wishing to atone for his brutality, began to weave a new romance about the unresponsive persons of these dolls.

‘ Let ’s pretend that this one is a crusader.’

‘ Let ’s pretend ! ’ that is the ‘ open sesame ’ to the wonderful world where everything is as one wishes it to be, where one hears what one wants to hear, sees what one wants to see. What a sun shines, what adventures come to one, — so easily. A pinafore turned inside out is a robe of satin, a gnarled branch a prancing steed. How one works, how one labors, all day long : what a lot there is to do. How brows are creased in thought over the plans of battles that are fought by soldiers whose heads come off, and the less accomplished infantry, whose only way of dying is to topple ungracefully side-ways. And Gilbert’s soldiers had only profiles, so that he found it necessary to pretend that they died with their wounds in front, and Agatha came to bury them,

singing the Marseillaise, with many tears for the noble heroes glistening in her eyes.

—— ‘ This one,’ concluded Gilbert, excitedly, ‘ should die now. What a pity its lids don’t come down.’

‘ But heaps of people die with a glassy stare,’ said Theresa.

So the afternoon passed away, and the great hot sun dropped down behind the trees, whose black outline traced a landscape that attracted Gilbert’s quick imagination.

‘ I say —— ’ he began, when Theresa interrupted him.

‘ Oh bother, — it’s time!’ she said, and they all sighed.

‘ *Mais voyons!*’ cried a deep voice behind them, and on the path stood Jeannette, her ample person filling the space between the mulberry-bushes. In fact, at that distance, one might easily have mistaken her for a tub with a towel hung to dry over one of its rotund sides, a long handled mop projecting above it. She gesticulated with vivacity, and her thimble flashed in the sun. She wore very loose soft slippers and did not care to walk much. She therefore shouted.

‘ *Voyons, M. Guilbert! la collation! C’est servi — que faites vous là? dites donc! Venez vite, bien vite, voyons!*’

The children approached and Jeannette marshalled them before, her black brows drawn together in their usual fierce frown.

‘ *Qu’est-ce que c’est que vous avez là sur votre*

tablier? Oh là, là, la pauvre poupée! Je n'ai jamais vu des enfants si méchants, jama s, jamais. Mais voyons, pas de bêtises — dame! Mademoiselle, pas si vite, — marchez donc à mes côtés, voyons!'

Jeannette continued to converse in this manner until they reached the drawing-room steps, where Clothilde was sitting, working quietly as usual. These steps were so wide as to form almost a terrace, and at each end stood the orange-trees, wafting a dainty fragrance abroad on the cooling air.

'Ah? here's *M. le fils!*' Mr. Strode cried, coming out into the sunlight, his golden beard and hair shining under his hat. Gilbert ran to meet him.

'O father, where have you been? Why did you go without me? did you paint anything? Do let us see. What jolly cakes, I'm so hungry.'

'Chicken and ham and pots of jam, that's all you think of, greedy!'

They sat down together in the same chair, and found much to say to each other, and much to laugh at.

Mr. Strode was followed by Mrs. Yorke, who came with a soft ripple of lace and silk. A most charming little woman, who always ornamented the situation in which she was placed.

'How dreadfully untidy you are, my child, really, it is quite time we went home,' she said, aimlessly smoothing Agatha's hair from her forehead. 'I wish I had a boy, Gilbert even when he is dirty and untidy always looks so nice.'

‘But consider the hot-water this youngster keeps me in; I always get the lion’s share of his scrapes,’ and Mr. Strode glanced across at his wife mischievously.

‘Because you are the lion of course. Always busy, Clothilde, I never knew such creatures! one can’t come here without finding you both as busy as possible. And yet you seem happy!’ she paused on the steps, the lace edge of her parasol framing her piquant little face.

‘Busy doing nothing generally,’ murmured Clothilde.

‘Yes, but what a happy existence. Think of me who am bored when I am busy.’

‘You do not look so just now.’

‘Oh, I am never bored *here*,’ she replied gushingly, and Mr. Strode laughed. With a final wave of the parasol she disappeared, and her little Victoria was heard to drive away. She had forgotten Agatha, who stayed to tea, and was taken home later by the concierge.

Gilbert sat silent beside his father, after the first spasm of chatter, and kept his eyes fixed on this handsome face, watching its every expression, every movement. He was perhaps vaguely conscious of the green lawn, in shadow now, edged all round with flowers and bushes, that scented the air delicately; of the steps, still in the sunshine, with his father sprawling all his length in a bath of light; of his dark, quiet mother in the shade of the doorway; and of the little table laid out with dainty china, one of Mr. Strode’s

innumerable fancies; of the still afternoon landscape beyond, alive with that quiet movement of things that precedes the silence of the evening, that far away tinkle of cows in the valley, the ‘*brrrrrré!*’ of the peasant to his horses, the last clank of the anvil in the smithy, the busy clatter of sabots in the courtyard, the six o’clock Angelus of the Roman Catholic church in the town — perhaps he was aware of it all. Afterwards it came back to him very vividly, all wrapped in that golden sunshine, and with the peculiar fragrance of old things, the aroma that lingers round remembrances and makes them sweet. The smell of life when it was new; yes, the smell of it . . .

A happy boy, — Gilbert.

And he had the happiest of fathers. The somewhat unsatisfactory state of his pecuniary affairs did not prevent Mr. Strode from enjoying himself to the utmost. He taught this to Gilbert, who learned his lesson readily. But then he adored his father rather as some idol than anything quite human, and Mr. Strode served as the peg from which depended all the different garbs of his imaginings. Thus his father was successively a Viking, a knight, a crusader, a red Indian, or Wellington, and all of these had the golden hair, the tall figure of the well-loved father. He drew them in chalk on the scullery wall, and when Jeannette came with a fierce frown and a broom to sweep them off, he smiled charmingly, and chalked moustaches on her face with such an im-

pudent grace, that she retired with the conviction that he would be a great artist some day.

'Qu'est-ce que tu me chantes là va! Tu me fais perdre le temps! Babillard!' she growled as she disappeared.

A most charming place, this Campagne Salève, with its gardens, its orchards, its orange-trees; its beautiful or grotesque treasures, that it had pleased Mr. Strode to collect at one time or another.

An exquisite miniature of a place this, and life sparkled there with the highest polish; the polish that cracks most easily.

'Pleasure,—always pleasure!' cried Mr. Strode, and he spent his existence seeking for it; it was to him so essential that it became a most serious matter, almost a trouble. Pleasure is a snail of a creature, and he recedes into his shell from the hand that would grasp him. But to Gilbert, who looked as children look, with his outside eyes at the outside of things, the sun did not speckle with too long a staring, the snail did not draw in its horns for he did not try to catch them. He saw only the beauty of his surroundings, and was content therewith. He felt the warmth of the sun and heard the birds sing. Who would want more?

When he woke in the morning, he laughed with sheer joy for the life that was in him; and in the hall, there was his father laughing too, playing with his dogs.

'Bonjour, bonjour, M. le fils!' cried this merry gentleman.

'*Bonjour, bonjour, bon petit père adoré!*' returned the son in the jargon of French children.

Mephistopheles smiled also, looking at this pastille, this exquisite dainty little picture.

Then, all day long, nothing but a busy enjoyment of pleasure. Clothilde sat in the shade of the great tree on the lawn, conversing with Mr. Strode through the wide-open studio window. The children came and went, and Jeannette's sonorous '*Voyons!*' sounded in the distance. Gilbert appeared now and then from some far corner, and raised a hot excited face to the head in the window, and he received more than his fair share of attention. He was a delightful plaything, not old enough to be tiresome and a trouble; and of course he brought his scraps of news to the big play-fellow who took so much interest in all his doings. Clothilde was only a shadow in the back-ground of his life; one of the many things that existed but to which he paid no great attention, just at that moment. He loved her a little less than any one else, because it was she only who punished him. Or Mr. Strode himself was about the garden, or in the 'piggery' they had built behind the shrubs. He was always busy, so busy, a business that resulted in clever sketches, scraps of verse, a song, some figure in wax or clay, which was the model of a great statue that he was always too busy to begin, just as his sketches were the ideas for big pictures he had never time to finish. Every one, of course, acknowledged his genius, admired these very

clever beginnings, and waited for that something very great which was to make him famous.

Every now and then, there were excursions on the lake, up the mountains, or butterfly hunts. On these occasions, Clothilde selected a spot for lunch, and stayed to boil kettles and so on; Mrs. Yorke, fresh, fair, indolent, graced the meal, the only cool, ornamental person present. She was always as cool and sparkling as iced-champagne; an indispensable element in parties of this kind.

On one of these hunts, they had settled down under the shade of the trees, only Mr. Strode as usual out in the sun. Clothilde, tired with her exertions, sat well in the shade, the green of the wood giving her white face, pensive, almost sad, an odd ghostliness. Mr. Yorke was busy turning over the contents of his box, Mrs. Yorke, lolling in a little arm-chair of moss, was busy talking nonsense with Mr. Strode, and Gilbert was discussing a serious question with Agatha.

‘Oh, he is a nice enough man, a soldier,’ Mrs. Yorke was saying; ‘one of these men who is all moustache and who spends his life combing it. He is dreadfully attached to his wife.’

‘Don’t you want anything to eat, you people?’ called Yorke, waving a tin. ‘Do you exist altogether on sunshine, Strode?’

‘Or you on scientific muck? Believe me, your dirty complexion is due to grubbing in horrid earthy holes.’

‘Knowledge,’ began Yorke sententiously.

‘Knowledge! Eruption of an over-cultured

mind. Pimples one's healthiness of thought, and one's visage.'

They laughed. Gilbert and Agatha paid no attention to this conversation. Gilbert was saying:

'I like the blue ones.'

'I like the white ones. They are like little ships,' Agatha replied.

'No, the blue ones are like flakes of sky, dropped down, don't you see? Only it's a pity to kill them. Suppose we let them go?'

'Oh no, I get a penny for twelve.'

'Well, Piggie, that's beastly of you. You wouldn't care to be pinned to a board.'

This thought brought tears to Agatha's eyes.

'Do you really like the blue ones best?'

'Oh yes.'

'Then so do I,' she whispered softly, preferring to have her ideas guided by some one else.

'Look,' shouted Gilbert suddenly. 'Come on, Piggie, hurry up, there's a beauty, ever so big!'

He bounded away with an irrelevant desire to catch it, even though he would let it free the minute it was in his net. Mr. Strode looked up and laughed.

'So! chasing a blue butterfly! You are beginning early, boy, and may you catch it. One does not generally catch a *papillon bleu*.'

'Oh I don't know, don't be so dreadfully melancholy; there are some people who come up to their ideals.'

'Really! I never meet them.'

'One knows that you are a proverbial chaser of

ideals; but do you mean to say you never caught one?'

At that he only laughed.

'Quite happy without them,' he murmured. 'Catch it, Gilbert. Look out, boy, don't let him go.'

The blue butterfly sailed away. It fluttered tranquilly out of reach over the hill. *Adieu, adieu, petit papillon bleu!*

'I'll give you all mine,' said Gilbert disappointed, and Agatha for a long time treasured a boxful of blue butterflies; and he, he had given his away, and the other had flown off. He was still chasing it.

Later, Agatha showed a tendency towards religion, which generally grew stronger after some quarrel with her governess, and which was apt to wane when more interesting matters claimed her attention. Her father was an Atheist who, after the fashion of his kind, thrust his theories under all noses, regardless that the smell thereof was distasteful to many nostrils. Her mother tolerated complacently a Roman Catholic French nurse, and a Protestant English governess, being too indolent to dispense with either until her husband should discover this mixture of creeds. Agatha, who generally inclined towards her nurse's religion, invariably adopted it in opposition to her governess at times of war.

She went one afternoon in a strongly Roman Catholic frame of mind, to recount the history of a recent battle, and to be consoled by Gilbert.

'Hullo!' he said.

‘ I got out at the window, Miss Gray locked me in. It does n’t matter. Father never minds what I do with her.’

She stood silent a while, watching him as he mended the rabbit coop.

‘ Do you believe in God?’ she asked abruptly.

He had not thought about the matter at all, so answered promptly:

‘ Yes.’

‘ I don’t. I believe in the Virgin Mary. She is ever so pretty, and she has got lots of tapers lighted under her.’

‘ It must be awfully hot,’ said Gilbert with boyish profanity.

‘ It’s only her picture, and anyway that’s very wicked. You should do a penance, you should “venerate” her. That’s what you always do to the Virgin.’

Gilbert, with his hat tilted back, looked as if the conversation were not much to his taste, but still he smiled as usual. Agatha flung her fair plait over her shoulder; an action that generally prefaced some request.

‘ Bertie, I wish you would paint me a nice little Virgin, like Jeannette’s, to hang on the wall.’

‘ Humph.’

Agatha put her arm through his, and rubbed her head against his shoulder. In this way she always conquered him, it made him feel particularly masculine and big.

‘ All right then, Piggie,’ he said good-naturedly, pulling her hair affectionately.

They went to the studio, where he rummaged among his father's paint-boxes, swept impeding sketches off a small easel, and with many flourishes, said he was ready.

'It's very difficult,' he remarked, determined to get his full meed of praise.

'I know, but *you* can do it. You will be an awfully great painter some day, won't you?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Then, I'll marry you.'

This was a new idea to Gilbert, and he thought over it a long time in silence. Then he laughed and the sound floated pleasantly through the house.

'All right, I don't mind,' he said at last. 'And you'd marry me even if I was n't a very great artist, would n't you?'

'Oh no,' she answered without the faintest hesitation. 'Just think, Bertie, how lovely it must be to be really great!' and she narrowed her eyes, dreaming of Fairyland thrones and cloth of gold.

'But if,' said Gilbert, almost in a whisper, 'if I were as great as father?'

'Oh, you would have to be ever so much more renowned than that,' she replied emphatically.

Gilbert laid down his brush and walked to the window.

'Bertie, you have n't finished it!'

'Are n't you going to finish it?'

'Bert-i-e!'

Gilbert stood still at the window, looking out

upon his father who lay on the lawn, intent upon something he held in his hands. Agatha wept, and the sound recalled Gilbert at once.

‘I am awfully sorry, only I don’t think you are very nice. I’ll go home.’

‘No, you won’t,’ he said quickly. ‘Not until you have begged his — my pardon.’

Agatha was a little afraid of him, and also very fond of him, and she very much wanted her Virgin, so she fell on her knees and begged pardon very prettily.

‘Get up,’ he said regally, with gratified pride and returning affection. ‘I’ll forgive you, and you may hold the palette.’

He remembered all these little things afterwards, and tried to feel the warmth of that glowing sun again. But that was impossible, he only saw it shining far away.

And this sun seemed to have shone in winter also; then too, as in summer, one was happy and busy.

Brush, brush fell the flakes of snow against the window-panes for some days, and outside everything was gray and cold. Inside the wood-fires roared up the chimney, and the flames were reflected in the polished floors. Gradually the world grew whiter and whiter, and a great silence reigned round about. Everything slept under this fleecy blanket, and the stillness of slumber lay on the motionless trees, and the wide white lawn. Sometimes a breath of wind sent a little shiver through the branches that creaked with

the weight of snow on them. Drip, drip fell the drops off the end of the water-spouts, yet such a silence there was at the Campagne in winter.

‘The angels moult,’ said Jeannette, looking out on the courtyard, where Spahi gambolled wildly as dogs will in snow.

‘*Dieu ! Qu’il fait froid, le vilain temps.*’

Then the sun shone again, the sky was blue, and a layer of powdered jewels lay on the top of everything. The world was gay, garmented all over with its very best winter coat, radiant, iridescent in honor of its greatest fête, Christmas, and the *Jour de l’an*.

How red Philomène’s stockings looked as she clattered about, singing and talking merrily. How blue Henri’s blouse, as he swept the gates clear.

Then one drove into town, jingle-jangle behind the bells of the sleigh. There, every one went about with big baskets full of packets, laughed, whistled and sang. The diligences seemed gayer than ever, their bright green and yellow covers glaring in the sun, going and coming with a great rollicking of horses and blowing of horns. In the market-place was a forest of fir-trees, ranging in height from a few inches to several feet, and all the little peasants trudged round-eyed *à la foire*.

At the Campagne there was an exchanging of presents, a continual murmur of people talking and laughing and exclaiming. Gilbert’s voice, uplifted above all others, was audible all day long. On New Year’s Day the French took their holiday, and the servants were feasted, and Philo-

mène and Josephine came with tears in their eyes, Henri with a ponderous Swiss grin, Jeanette with frowning emotion to thank Monsieur and Madame for their kindness. Mr. Strode would not have it spoilt by the presence of any English servant.

Gilbert enjoyed these simple things; but then he was just so high, small enough to smell the scent of flowers, to feel the poetry of things, to have the soul to enjoy them.

Then the Yorkes went away. Agatha appeared very sad at the parting, and told Gilbert that she still kept her blue butterflies. He smiled with a tear in his eye, and told her that she was a little idiot to care so much about them. Mr. Strode felt it also, and drove away with them to the station to see them off. Clothilde stood on the door-step, watching the departing carriage, a smile on her lips, a pucker in her brow.

‘Good-bye! Good-bye!’ shouted Mr. Strode, waving his hat to the pleasant little companion of so many summer days.

‘Good-bye, good-bye!’ cried Gilbert to the fair tear-stained face swollen with grief that leant from the window of the train.

After this, the sun shone less brightly. The anxious frown grew on Clothilde’s face, and Gilbert often heard bursts of anger from his father.

‘Get away, you confounded little pest,’ was said to him once or twice, when he approached with his usual flow of conversation, confident of receiving a quizzical attention.

Then one day, he found Jeannette with a more than ordinary fierce frown, clearing out his drawers, and asking what of all this rubbish he wished to keep.

‘*Mais oui*, certainly, you are going away, and you cannot take all these messes with you. Eh! Don’t talk to me, *voyons*, how should I know anything? You must ask of Madame where you are going.’

There ensued a turmoil; Mr. Strobe went away by himself in too great a hurry at the last moment to catch his train to say good-bye to any one. All the boxes were packed, every one was very busy, and Gilbert was wanted nowhere. He wandered solitary, desolate through the rooms where each little year of his life had fled so happily, fled, fled. . . . Men came into the house to value this and that, pictures and books were heaped in piles, carpets rolled up, furniture huddled into forlorn groups about the hall and passages. Sack and straw lay about the sunny, bright lawn, everything was being sold and carted away.

Then one said good-bye to the orchards and gardens, to the big tree on the lawn, whose red leaves fluttered down like tears it seemed to Gilbert. One was embraced for five minutes by Jeannette, and caught a last glimpse of her well-known white cap and frowning brow. One spent half an hour with Henri, leaving instructions about the dogs. Philomène and Henri listened in sniffling silence. At last one drove out at

the iron gate, and Henri, and every one waved hats and handkerchiefs to the sad occupants of the carriage. One had a last glance at the white house, still sleeping as ever, in the sunshine.

'Adieu ! adieu !'

The gates clanged behind them.

Good-bye, good-bye, chère Campagne Salève.

Adieu ! adieu ! petit papillon bleu !

CHAPTER III

GILBERT was sent to school, and after a term or two, enjoyed it very much; but when he went home for his holidays it was to a London lodging-house.

‘Well, Gilbert, my boy!’ cried his radiant father. ‘Your mother is not able to meet you. We are house-hunting, and she is away on that errand just now. We want a nice little house;’ and for a while they lived on Clothilde’s money, which came to her at the opportune death of her mother.

But unhappily it did not cover Mr. Strode’s requirements, and he said to his wife, ‘Never mind, Henry — little ass — has the property now. You are his only heir, and after you, Gilbert, of course. You forget these things,’ he added a little testily. ‘You magnify our difficulties absurdly, you should look into the future.’

He always looked into the future; he ran through the whole of to-day so as to arrive at to-morrow more quickly, and when to-morrow was cloudy, he saw the sunshine of many years ahead shining on the other side of it. He was annoyed at his wife’s shortness of vision, and he was himself so happy that he could see no reason

for her melancholy. Clothilde listened in silence, and forbore to say that it might be long, very long, before her brother's property would become theirs. He was of the kind that live long.

Gilbert spent another term at school, and then did not go at all, for Mr. Strode would not send him to a day school as his mother wished. It could not be thought of: Gilbert must have masters, or stay at home, and he, Mr. Strode, would teach him. A boy of his talent could not be spoilt at a bad school. So Gilbert stayed at home, and learned many things that are not generally taught; but also his Latin and Greek were considerably better than the ordinary, for his father's knowledge penetrated more or less into all things, and his intimate acquaintance with languages, classic and otherwise, was remarkable.

'Dearest,' said his wife, 'the child must go to school, you forget his age. In some ways he is very backward, and he will find himself disqualified for the ordinary business of life. No,' she added hastily, 'we cannot afford masters. If you would only sketch and paint for sale! Take a studio and work!'

In answer to that, he shrugged his shoulders, and smiling, said that he could not possibly paint unless the mood took him; he could not tie himself down to make a livelihood by one thing. Bah! impossible. He could manage the money if she would only let him. 'She wasted in her housekeeping fearfully,' he cried, bursting into rage; 'when he wanted to buy that exquisite

alabaster vase, she had absolutely not a penny in the house!'

Then a cold compelled him to stay indoors, and he gave Gilbert lessons when the mood took him, but mostly taught him to paint. He pictured the future that lay before them, how he would do this, or Gilbert that; he drew the attractions of artist life, — an idle pleasure to pass the idle hours that he spent on the sofa, the tips of his fingers gently poised against each other, his imagination at play. It was, as usual, a busy idleness. And Gilbert listened, absorbed these tasty morsels, cuddled in his good but perverted memory these visions of coming greatness, — and forgot arithmetic. It is not a thing one should forget, arithmetic: one lives by it.

Then a great event happened to Gilbert, he began to think. Hitherto, he had not thought at all, he had only reflected his father. Now he meditated, and fell to wondering why this father was still so young and buoyant, his mother so old and careworn. He had never observed the details of his daily life, and now they came upon him with a rush, grinning, grimacing ugly realities, and he could not get rid of them. They were the more horrid because, with his dreamer's eye only half open, he saw them distorted. He wondered how it was that they had come to be so poor, and he gazed disgusted on his shabby surroundings — so shabby to his half-open eye. Why had his father's manifold talent brought them neither fame nor fortune? What made it difficult? He

suddenly thought that he led a lazy life, and began to contemplate selling some sketches, and he dropped his lashes and dreamt about it, about studying in Rome, perhaps, or else in Paris, working hard, delightful work; and the gradual success that he would earn by patient toil, for above all things he would like to earn and win his laurels hardly. Then, he and his father, then, then. . . . Yes, he dropped his lashes, and dreamt about it.

He began to make advances to his mother, awoke to her personality. She did not repulse him, but she received him quietly: one could hardly have told whether she loved him or not.

Then his soul was fired by the news of Lester's early success. At twenty-five Lester was making a name for himself, that odd, unnoticed brother of Theresa. He, also, began a picture in real earnest, a great big thing that was to be his first step after Lester. It seemed so easy, one painted one's picture, had it exhibited, and the thing was done. Things, when you put them that way, are all very simple.

How was it, then, that his father had not succeeded?

For some time Mr. Strode had been daily engaged in the city, and he seemed to find his business there both interesting and exciting. He was angry with Clothilde for not taking more interest in his projects; her pale resigned face angered him. The thin hand laid in remonstrance on his sleeve enraged him. So it happened that he was duped in some transaction, and they

moved into lodgings again; cheap, common lodgings; but Clothilde, with the last fragment of her money, a little hidden store, managed to buy a house in Penton Street.

And then her energy, long worn to a very thin thread, snapped quietly.

There was not much furniture in the room, and Gilbert had to sit on the bed, for there was no chair. It rained outside, and the houses over the way were grayer than usual. Yes, it was very gray out there; a thick, dark sky brooded over the tops of the houses, seeming to dip in heavy folds between the chimney-pots like an ill-stretched canopy. Everything was wrapped in impenetrable silence, such as reigns in the dull parts of noisy cities, only far away a man shouted, 'Cy-o-als!' at regular intervals down the empty street. Suddenly Campagne Salève came before him, all glowing with sunshine. He saw the laughing group upon the steps, and Jeannette was singing somewhere:

'Mais, vous n'aurez pas Pier-re,
Tron, tron, tron, tron, bri, bri, bri, bri-ó ——'

'Cy-oals!' shouted the man, a little nearer.

'At least you will have a roof over you,' murmured his mother. 'Take care of him, my boy . . .'

There was surely something wrong about it all — this dismal room, that dismal street, this silent end to a silent life. Gilbert was silent also, for his passions were not of the kind that blaze and flare upon the top.

So the shadowy figure of his mother receded altogether into the shade, and although she had been a background to the scenes of his life, yet she left a blank that remained. She had had a strong restraining influence upon his nature, though no one knew it; he felt it, and missed it when she was no longer there. But the impression she had made remained, and time did not wear it away. He knew more of her ten years after than he did just then.

At the death of his wife Mr. Strode became very ill. He came home at night very excited; he rushed to his wife's room and flung open the door, beginning to speak before he was well inside, and, reaching the bed, fell headlong down beside it, shaking the floor with the heaviness of his fall. Henry overcame his dislike to Mr. Strode on this occasion, his pride not allowing that his only sister should be buried meanly; and accordingly a grand, sombre funeral was given her. Her son and brother walked behind an over-decorated hearse, and listened as the earth closed over her with a dull thud.

'I don't know whether you are as much of a fool as your father,' snarled Henry to his nephew. 'But you are at least her son. Any decent debts I shall pay. You will have to be frank with me, and it will depend upon circumstances what I pay, and how. Don't think you can count upon me for all and sundry. I'm not rich. Try to marry a nice girl, one at least that is pretty and not vulgar.' He made an expressive gesture that

was lost on Gilbert. 'I have nothing to do with your father's affairs, remember that,' and he departed.

Gilbert had listened heedlessly. 'Old beast!' he thought, without much warmth, and he also went away sadly. He nursed his father with a love that overcomes all obstacles, and little by little Mr. Strode recovered. Gilbert, of course, was not accustomed to think of everything, and even Martha's presence did not prevent an accumulation of bills that lengthened his face afterwards. In these two months he learned a great deal.

Mr. Strode arose with silvered hair, tottering legs, and bent back. 'Be all right next week,' he said with a radiant smile.

He had now to manage his affairs himself, for, of course, Martha could not be allowed to do so. It angered him greatly to find how dependent he had been on Clothilde. It was really very hard that he, no longer as strong as formerly, should be forced to do all these menial duties for himself. He flew into a violent passion when bill-time came, for hitherto he had had nothing to do with the paying of things. He had only bought what he wanted. He went out almost every afternoon by himself. He took his umbrella, and would not have Gilbert's assistance. 'I am not in my second childhood yet, and I am likely to know more about the streets of London than you do,' he said testily, when Gilbert demurred at his going alone. He paused at the corner of the street to see that he was not followed. His son gazed after his

tottering form from the window, helplessly. One day he went out as usual, and Gilbert sat down calmly beside the fire to wait for him. The early winter twilight closed in, and still he sat beside the fire, and Mr. Strode had not come back. Every sound in the street caught his ear. 'Something has happened at last,' he told himself drearily, and listened and listened until he lost all sense of the proportion of sounds, and started nervously at the dropping of a cinder on the hearth. At last his father came back, not a whit the worse for his outing, a semblance of his old, happy smile on his face as he entered.

'Well,' he said, bursting as usual into the middle of his subject, 'you are to begin next week.'

'The Life School?' asked Gilbert, perplexed. He had been thinking on the subject of his career for some time, making up his mind on certain points before he broached his plans to his father, which he intended to do this very evening. This was opportune.

'Life School? Damn the boy! does he think he's going to a *Life School* when his father is dying of starvation for want of immediate money? What a selfish thing youth is — it thinks of nothing but itself! Those ideas of yours, Gilbert, about a studio, and goodness knows all what, are all very fine for you, sir, for you,' he stuttered, flying in defence of himself from anger to rage. 'You think the nice future of twenty years hence that you have been building for yourself will be here to-morrow, and you forget — you choose to forget,

perhaps — that there is an actual present to be lived through — that I am penniless, that I may even be reduced to dying of starvation — I!’ and he drew himself up, a tall, broad-shouldered man yet. It did seem absurd that he, above all others, should die such a death. Next moment he shrank again into a bowed old man, and wandered restlessly about the room.

Gilbert listened. He was taller, though less broad, than his father. He pulled himself up to the extreme height of his long, lank figure, and his face was obscured by the dimness above the lamp shade.

His father paused before him irresolutely, and as they stood thus the common little room seemed too small for their silence. The idol of his heart, cherished very carefully for so long, but sometime tottering, fell of a sudden, and in the chaotic confusion caused by this shattering Gilbert lost consciousness of his surroundings, and stood erect in silence, numbed by the greatness of his emotion. He hid his fists in his pockets, and the veins swelled on his brow.

Presently he asked dully, ‘What is it that I am to begin next week?’

His father sat down in the rickety arm-chair by the fireside, smiling genially.

‘Ah, now, that’s right! I knew you would see the reason of it. You always were your father’s own son, were n’t you, old boy? I’ve got a splendid place for you in Stanley’s office — languages required, you know. You will get as good a

chance as any young fellow in your shoes can expect. It's not like some little clerk's place, a thing one need be ashamed of ; oh, no, not at all ! I saw some really nice young men there to-day, and I think you need companions. Paid monthly, too ! Not much, to be sure, to begin with, but we shall have it to fall back upon,— we will not starve yet a while. Poor Tegart-Hoare is really very obliging in spite of his wife.'

Gilbert listened without moving, and Mr. Strode rambled on. He must really start work again, now that he was better he must astonish the wretches who had dropped him, and from whom he had fallen proudly asunder, with a specimen of the true worth of his talent. He had a splendid idea, but the subject would require to be treated on a large canvas. He would see about it to-morrow.

Gilbert left the room abruptly, and tore out into the streets seeking refuge in their glare and rattle. Nothing in the crowd repulsed him ; these loud laughs did not smite his ear rudely, the hot odors of gas and cookery, of many people crowded in small places, did not nauseate him. He mingled with this Saturday night's crowd, elbow to elbow he hurried along with a creature from whom he would have fled in daylight ; on, on, in this turmoil of a laughing, smoking, cursing crowd ; on, on, through the muck of the gutters. . . .

He came home in the early morning with the fragments of the fallen idol swept away out of

sight ; no doubt in some seldom searched corner of his heart they were stored and treasured. The intense passion roused last night slumbered again, and the boy in him also.

In the evening of his first day at the office, he went to see Theresa. Mr. Strode never visited these old friends, and Gilbert went there partly in secret ; his father seemed jealous of Lester, and had moreover a strange fear of being patronized by his former friends. This prickly pride was very absurd ; no one had ever thought of patronizing Mr. Strode.

Gilbert had not seen Theresa since his mother died, and he could not very well have told what sent him to her now. He did not wish for sympathy or confidence, so he told himself, and he had not that longing that lighter natures have for an audience to his sorrow. But in truth he went to be scolded, to be pinched into a little warmth by Theresa's straightforward utterances.

She was alone, and jumped up briskly on seeing him. She was no better-looking now than she had been when she was young : an odd wizened little creature, like the shrivelled kernel of a nut, with a nervous habit of grimacing, and an astonishing manner of issuing outrageous sentiments unvarnished by any delicacy of speech. Her mind and tongue and limbs seemed to wag in obedience to a string pulled by some one else inside. She, in fact, catapulted all she said, and what she did not catapult she pop-gunned.

She received him, however, without remark, for

sympathy between such friends is expressed by silence rather than words.

Gilbert was a little stiff.

‘We have moved into Penton Street,’ he began. ‘Father seems pretty well. You will be glad to hear that I have found a permanent employment.’

‘That sounds like a phrase you have been learning to say. I think you are too old now to repeat your lessons to me. Sit down in this chair and tell me about it properly.’

‘I ——’ he began and stuck again.

Theresa fidgeted impatiently, and he hurried on with awkward flippancy.

‘Listen, Theresa,’ he said, ‘and rejoice. I have got a place in Stanley’s, you know — swell place.’

Presently he turned round to construe her silence.

‘Who is the perpetrator of that?’

‘It’s a very good post. I — my father is delighted.’

‘Really!’

‘Yes.’

‘But I thought you were going to take up illustrating, and I have been to Herison about it, and he said he thought your work was unnecessarily good. You are not going to give it up! After all — and you were so eager about it, besides it would pay.’

‘Stanley’s is a certainty ——’

‘But begin by illustrating out of hours.’

He hesitated. Illustrating was to him almost as nauseating as the office; he had had such

very great ambitions, art had seemed such a very exquisite mistress, so far removed from pencil and paper and toil in Penton Street. 'It has become impossible,' he growled, his head in his hand.

'Well,' Theresa sighed, 'I suppose you know. Only it seems such a waste of good talents. If you could only sell them to some one who would make better use of them.'

'The unfortunate person would make a bad investment ——'

'We are wandering from the subject.'

Suddenly, the coldness and bareness of his present life came over him. Theresa was his only friend, and he did not see very much of her, and feeling that he was not of the society that frequented her house, he sneaked there secretly, at times when he knew she would be alone. His father had dropped from his old surroundings as effectually as a dead man, and in as short a time. Gilbert had not spoken to any one, it seemed to him, for months. No one cared either. . . . Somehow, this great room with its bright fire, and Theresa grimacing more than usual in the fitful light of it, moved him strangely. But then, oddly enough, Theresa was a person who drew confidences from others; her servants came to her with sad histories, to be consoled; Lester, of course, depended on her entirely, and Gilbert could not remember the secret he had from her.

So he tumbled to his knees beside her.

'Theresa! Traddles! Say something, do talk

to me ! No,—don't mention it again — don't make it any harder — I hate this beast of an office — I tell you I've been nearly mad — don't rub me up or I shall go all over it again — I ——'

. . . Theresa hung a wet handkerchief over her knee to dry at the fire. She was talking prosily.

' I meet Lawrence Tegart-Hoare, the artist one, he comes here in fact. But the other, who is connected with the Stanleys, is tied to a Salvation Army dame now, I believe, one of these people all prickly with virtue, that goad other people — like me — to *là-bas*. That sensational agony-column kind of religion always upsets me. I am afraid you will see a good deal of it.'

So he did in the coming six years, for Mr. Strode had reasons for keeping on very friendly terms with the rich brother of the artist whom he had known.

Mr. Strode went often to this big house in West Kensington, and Gilbert wondered to see him in an atmosphere so utterly uncongenial to his nature. Gilbert himself did not find it very entertaining. He came and went, came and went, to and from the office, week after week, month after month, and life became to him the dreary routine it is to most people. All serious thought of art died out or was crusted over. Mr. Strode himself seemed to have forgotten it, and never touched canvas or brushes. On the contrary, he had taken his place in an art-hating circle of society, and was as charming as ever in this new atmosphere of busy charity and mission-rooms.

In the evenings Gilbert came home and wrote at extra work he got so as to have a continual supply of ready money for Mr. Strode to spend on his little occupations. After all, thought the son, few men with shattered health and broken fortune would lead such a happy, busy life, would find so much for his idle hands to do. Or, other evenings, he laughed, talked, and read aloud, and sometimes Martha saw them with their heads close together under the common white lamp, playing like children at a comedy they concocted, which was acted by absurd figures that Mr. Strode's deft fingers modelled out of wax. These figures, in the process of melting, collapsed into suggestive attitudes, and with his faculty of doing everything of this kind, Mr. Strode immediately struck off appropriate rhymes, which were sometimes so good that Gilbert wrote them down in a book. On these occasions he sat on late into the night writing or wasting time with his head on the table, for it took a year or two for that detestable office, that stool to which he was tied for life, to become simply an unheeded everyday matter. Then Saturday afternoon or Sunday were so often spent at the Tegart-Hoare's; at first amusing enough, then wearisome, and then disgusting.

'Well, my boy, we will go *there* to-morrow afternoon,' his father would say.

Gilbert did not answer for fully five minutes, and put on a certain expression that did not become him. He was at no time handsome; a very

long lank man, with the thin white face of one who lives much indoors. A cold taciturn face which ordinarily changed very little in speaking, and to which the conventional smile of politeness added no charm. His eyes were melancholy, intensely so, but he peered through his glasses in the unbecoming manner common to short-sighted people and the beauty of eye was not evident in the rapid glance one throws at a man of this personal appearance.

‘I do not very much care for the Tegart-Hoares; is it necessary to go so often?’ he said at last.

‘They are amusing, and besides useful. You must learn business, Gilbert, you must know people for policy’s sake sometimes,’ Mr. Strode nodded his head cunningly. ‘Tegart-Hoare is nice enough, and he still has a spice of worldliness left in him that turns up when his wife is not by. Ella is a charming, straightforward girl.’

Gilbert opened his eyes wide at that, but gave in of course, for it never occurred to him to oppose his father.

Only, one Saturday, returning from the office early, it suddenly seemed to him that this life was unutterably dreary, to have lasted for years, an unbroken gray monotone. The thought of that house in West Kensington sent a shiver down his back, and he paused irresolutely. He was shoved off the pavement by a gay rude crowd that was fighting for entrance at the pit-door of a music-hall. Looking up, he found that he had passed the place often, and with a sudden gleam of

vicious joy, he flung himself into the crowd fighting with the best of them for a place. He enjoyed himself very much.

But, when he went home, in one room there was a weeping and helpless Martha, in another his father, on the verge of illness with rage, shaking with unrestrained passion. In the evening he vowed that he would never do it again, and sighed, for theatre-going, from the vagrant show to the Lyceum, was much to his heart.

His life was not, perhaps, very entertaining, since he did not find much diversion at the house of the Tegart-Hoares. This was a fine place, richly furnished in such solid manner as is appropriate to people who eschew the frivolities of life, and are somewhat bulky in material being. The drawing-room was a large, handsome room, decorated with palms and a magnificent mantelpiece that caught the eye at once. A smell of pews hung about it by reason of spare chairs and Bibles being stored in a cupboard there.

Something ominous about this room struck Gilbert the first day he entered it, and he never, even when it became familiar, got rid of the feeling. It was sombre, an atmosphere of indigestible richness pervaded it that cast its heavy spell upon the entering stranger.

Then Mrs. Tegart-Hoare sailed in, with a hand extended in courteous welcome.

‘So sorry to have kept you waiting. I am so busy and I am sure you will not object, when you know that I work in a good cause. Is this

Gilbert? He is surely the age of my John. Ah yes! I have heard very good reports of him from my husband.'

She gazed at Mr. Strode a little suspiciously, knowing that he had been an artist and hence very wicked when young. Her husband had ventured to point out that his old friend would make excellent material for converting, and in this spirit of charity, she received the Strodes without further demur.

Her suspicion, however, soon transferred itself to Gilbert, although, she thought, he really looked very respectable and gentlemanly: for Mr. Strode had evidently quite reformed since his youth, and he bowed and smiled, and sat down beside her with that appearance of being so extremely interested that came to him in talking with any stranger.

'Ah, I have often heard of your works,' he said.

'When one sees the degradation, the savagery of these poor people in the streets, one is moved to make an effort to redeem them.'

Mr. Strode was sympathetic; he inquired after her numerous charities, her prize-givings, her meetings, was, in fact, so very charming, so delightfully attentive, that Mrs. Tegart-Hoare spoke even more on the subject than was her habit in ordinary conversation.

Gilbert sat opposite, a little amused, a little astonished, and observant. She was a personable woman, big, plain, majestic, with an odd and

almost childlike simplicity on her face that showed she was no hypocrite. She believed all she preached, every word of it, with a faith that made her sermons quite eloquent. She had found the narrow way, she said, when she stood up, stout, imposing, in the Mission House. She exhorted all present to follow her, — she paused earnestly, with her eyes upturned to the ceiling, her mouth where she left it in pronouncing the last word. This would have been more convincing if her big teeth had not caught one's attention; as it was, one felt ashamed of the suspicion that the narrow way was constructed by herself on an improved nineteenth century model. It would, Gilbert pondered once, be difficult to follow her there; it was narrow, and she filled its space herself.

As Gilbert sat opposite her, he wondered why he vaguely suspected her, what it was about her good, simple face that he distrusted.

‘Yes,’ Mr. Strode was saying with a smile, ‘A beautiful book, I agree with you. Have you read Renan’s *Vie de Jésus*?’

Gilbert gazed in astonishment, his father was surely taking her off!

‘No,’ she answered. ‘But I read, with great appreciation, — by Moncure Conway. It did one *good*, it seemed to lift one up into —’

Mr. Strode turned his head away, and glanced across at his son very oddly.

‘Indeed! You read freethinking books then?’

Mrs. Tegart-Hoare’s teeth gleamed wide asunder,

severed by astonishment, and her lips receded like retreating waves, leaving bare and unlovely expanse of gum.

‘*Freethinking?* oh dear me no! I read those religious books for instruction, for knowledge, of course, — but ——’

Such was her simplicity of faith, that she read her own creed in books of quite opposite sentiment; read aloud to her husband in pointed unction things that under another name would have caused her teeth to gnash in horror.

She was really a simple woman.

At this somewhat awkward moment, the door was hurled open, and Ella tumbled in, laughing loudly. A school-boyish giggle was audible outside, and Ella shouted, ‘O Frank, you horrid boy, I’ll pay you out!’ with a boisterous tom-boyishness unbecoming to her years, for she was twenty-two.

‘Ella-h!’ exclaimed her mother feebly.

‘Oh, I did n’t see any one was there,’ said the good-natured elephant, not at all put out, and she laughed again and sat down to talk to Gilbert.

At first sight she was rather entertaining. She had no lack of conversation about subjects new to him then, and her odd jumble of religious phraseology and school slang was amusing.

‘Oh, the boys are awful fun! We have a lot of them, and make them carpenters and all that. Many of them hear the name of the Lord for the first time when they come to us. But they really

get an idea of religion and goodness in a very short time. We have them all scrubbed at a tank. We then teach them hymns. Oh, no! they tore the Bible to pieces. It was dreadful, but I read them fairy tales, and they were quite good. The women are more difficult to reform, — they cheat, you know, for the Christmas packets; but we managed it by tickets. No, not mother; it is one of my aunts, who is very High Church, who does all that.'

Then she said that she painted texts and religious things for her aunt. Would he like to see them? He said yes, and she romped to the door with her usual energy, upsetting a little table on her course.

'Ella-h!' exclaimed her mother vaguely, and from force of habit, without turning to see what had happened.

She led the way to a little carved wood backstairs, traversing a wide landing, whence one saw the huge wall of the staircase covered with pictures and valuable prints.

'Ah!' said Gilbert, with awaking interest. 'Hogarth's.'

'Hogarth's?' Ella turned an unresponsive brown eye upon the wall. 'I dare say, some of papa's old collections. Oh, those water-colors are n't Hogarth's, I know, because they are Uncle Lawrence's.'

Gilbert gazed at her in stupefaction at this, but before he had time to reply some one coming upstairs laughed and remarked slowly,

‘Ella, as usual, displaying her ignorance with flying colors.’

This was Mr. Tegart-Hoare, a lean, lazy man, whose fear of death in the first place, and want of resistance in the second, had drawn him from a worldly life into his present religious surroundings. He was a shadow of his wife, always there, never particularly evident. She was his regulator in all matters — it saved trouble. He simply took care to see that her coffee-houses kept themselves, and that the mission-rooms did not exceed the sum he allowed for them. But she was a very good manager. Her charities, somehow, seldom cost her very much.

He passed on, after a word or two, and went into the drawing-room.

As Gilbert followed Ella down a passage they passed another shadow, a small, haggard creature in old carpet slippers. This, she explained, was her eldest brother, who had been very ill. Her mother had made him a clergyman, had written his sermons for him, and had urged him to learn them off by heart, which had resulted in brain fever. Her second brother seldom lived at home, for he whistled shocking tunes about the house and could not be tolerated, and he consequently lived in other circles, but Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, being so busy and wrapped up in her ‘good’ works, had no time to inquire what circles he frequented, nor how he managed to slip through his allowance so quickly. Ella loved her school-boy brother, who would have liked religion well enough had he

been allowed to play the big drum, but as this instrument did not figure in his mother's meetings, he found it rather dull. Ella chattered all this to Gilbert, showed him her painting-room, her little texts and cards, and he listened inattentively. He did not care for her; he conceived her to be big, coarse, stupid, and his dislike of her was nameless. It arose from the sensitiveness that Penton Street, the walk to the office, his introspective life had fostered into a nettle-y growth that stung him at every turn. He hurt only himself, however. It is, of course, better to hurt others. . . .

Theresa and her brother had been away from town a year or two, and Gilbert missed them very much. He went joyfully to see her as soon as he heard of their return, but the drawing-room was crowded, for others also ran to see Lester. He was a very great man nowadays. He was a recluse, and therefore it was the highest aim of one's life to say that one had been to his house, and one ran with all one's might to be the first inside his door when he came to town. But a great many people went to see Theresa, rather than her brother, for Lester was seldom visible.

Gilbert crept in shyly, and sat down unnoticed in a corner, afraid to stand lest his height should attract attention. It seemed to him so long since he had been anywhere but in that sombre house at West Kensington, and this laughing, and talking, and cultured flippancy, this apparent light-heartedness, light and dainty as dandelion fluff,

struck him and stirred him strangely. He knew that it was an exterior quality only, but he had lived in the midst of it when he was a boy, and the very smell of it raised a longing in him that was painful. He tingled in response to things that were said around him, and much was said, for every one talked, talked, talked, just the talk to which he liked to listen — bright, effervescent, sometimes clever, always entertaining. Success! Success! was written on almost every face; the ample egotism of it shone in almost every eye, and he felt that he had no business there. But why should he not realize his old dreams — begin at the bottom and work upwards as others did, to carry this triumph of overcome obstacles in his eye also? There was yet plenty of time — oh! plenty of time. Why not enjoy life, live in the sunshine, and succeed?

‘Live, eat, and drink, for to-morrow you die, — yes, take the drink you like best, a thimbleful only, or a tumblerful if you can; drink, drink! for to-morrow it will not matter. If you love the sunshine, live in the sunshine, for who pities the idiot who shuts it out because some one at his side prefers the dark? Do what you want; push along in the scramble and shout for joy, stamping on the toes of others; drink a big drink of what you like best, for to-morrow it will not matter.’ He thought all that with the unnecessary bitterness of very young people. Then he remembered the burden of debts, the common little home in Penton Street, and he left Theresa’s with a

hanging head. But he found her company invigorating, the air of his home unbearable without some break, and he went to her again.

‘Why did you sneak away on Friday?’

‘I was obliged to go.’

‘Because you have a morbid idea that clerks at Stanley’s have no place in our circle? I don’t choose my friends by the pattern of their coats.’

‘I prefer not to come, don’t you see ——’

‘Gilbert, I see the influence of the Tegart-Hoares upon you.’

He laughed, and described that household to her. He could be amusing enough when taken off his guard.

‘How dreadful to be burdened with a soul that requires such an amount of looking after!’ she exclaimed when he finished.

‘As bad as having a Toy-Yorkshire.’

Gilbert noticed that she was unusually nervous and irritable, that she looked very tired and very old. She talked to him irrelevantly and with unnecessary vigor, and she did not seem conscious of his silence. His grunts, his gestures, and certain manipulation of his glasses, gave as much impression of conversation as the ordinary chatter of other people. She turned her eyes continually to the door, and seemed to be listening for some distant sound. Noticing this, and concluding that he was not wanted, he rose to go, but she detained him with a quick movement of her hand.

‘Lester has finished a picture, I really think his

masterpiece this time. He has been working very hard, in order to finish Mrs. Studleigh by the twelfth. And he has set his heart on frescoes for the ante-room,' she said. 'I know you like his work. Wait till he leaves the studio, I will show it to you. We have had such a bother about the frame,' she broke off and looked harassed.

'He always succeeds,' Gilbert murmured.

'Yes,' she said proudly. 'No one has yet accused him of failure. Only I am afraid that he is verging towards the boundaries of eccentricity. His ideas run away with him.'

'Ah!' remarked Gilbert vacuously, an introspective gleam in his eyes. 'And does he think that he has never failed?'

'I don't know, he never speaks about it, he seems to lose all interest in anything accomplished. He simply begins again. It will be viewed next Friday, and you must come for once, — yes, really. You have never seen Lester *chez lui*,' and she glanced up again proudly.

At this moment the door opened, and Lester ran in.

Theresa looked up with a bright loving smile that shed a pleasing remembrance of youth over her face. There is a great charm, a something that tickles one's soul kindly, in the sight of such a beauty on a plain face. One remembers that there are other things besides red lips and long eyelashes.

'Mary Leighs has not come yet,' she began; but he looked at her unseeing for a moment with

his dreamy eyes, and a little smile hovered round his mouth.

‘Finished?’

‘Yes, come, and see,’ he said quickly, and throwing his arm round her neck, led her off.

The ante-chamber to the studio was crowded with scraps of embroidery, rugs, curtains, dresses, weapons, and all those things, that Lester, however, seldom used for painting from; but the studio itself was a bare place, containing only what was necessary, with a couch or two for visitors. Near the window stood the newly finished picture on its easel, and Lester ran to it excitedly, and waited impatiently for them to comment upon it. Not that it mattered to him whether the rest of the world cared for his work or no. The picture was finished, and ceased to interest him, but he wanted to be praised. And the more people that praised him the better; he liked to see a roomful of people paying homage to him, to him! He seldom spoke on the subject of art, never established theories, never defended himself when attacked; but he disliked those who attacked him, for it seemed to him that they were rude, and interfered with his pleasure. No one could quite tell what Lester thought about anything, or whether he did think. What did it matter? He was a great genius, his art was wonderful, his personality nothing.

Gilbert gazed at the picture, and a warm glow of admiration crept all over him. Theresa stood beside him, also in silence, for there was nothing

to say. It had, as usual, Lester's power of driving criticism from the mind of the spectator. A charm hung over his work, so that one could not say this foreshortening is wrong, that impossible, the light wrongly centred, or the tints opaque. No, one looked at them and marvelled and thought. The spirit of his idea was upon them, and one forgot they were done in paint, on canvas.

'Well,' said Lester a little crossly.

Gilbert jumped, and remembered that he was expected to admire.

'Very fine, — magnificent!' he remarked dryly, with a cold smile at his effort to praise; absurd of Lester to expect it. 'More than magnificent, it's ——'

A little gratified smile crossed Lester's lips quickly, but he waited for more.

Then they looked at the picture again.

It was Genevra locked in the chest. The box was bisected so that one saw her inside. The background was a dark-grayish brown, and the light came in from the old, started seams. Genevra knelt, looking straight from the picture, and her hands seemed to be seeking up the edges of the frame, aimlessly seeking for some spring to let her out. But she knew that she would have to die there, and the horror of it grew in her eyes as one looked at her. A most unutterable despair, an irrevocable doom emanated from the face of this simple figure of a girl.

Music had raised this feeling before in Gilbert, but never a picture; and this was odd, for it had

none of the searching, enervating, nervous passion of music; on the contrary, it was cold. That was its striking fault, or quality, it was cold. It was horrifying, but not convincing.

Gilbert mumbled some more commonplace phrases, the usual things that one always says, and Lester listened, an angry frown growing on his face. He fidgeted before the picture, and suddenly cried, 'It is a failure!' and began to run up and down excitedly.

'Lester!' exclaimed Theresa in amazement, for she had never heard him say this before. She had never heard him make any noticeable comment upon a finished picture.

He was a thin, little man; his fair, pointed face was not remarkable for expression, and it seemed impossible that he should contain in his small body the terrific passion that burst from him at times in volcanic explosions. It was always there, underneath, and it seemed to vibrate through him as air passing over strings sets them a-quiver: it thrilled in the under-tones of his voice, it gleamed at the back of his eye, and to shake hands with him was like taking hold of the handle of a battery. He was not conceited, for one could not put a word to his faults or virtues, but he demanded — unconsciously — the admiration of every one, and he got it; he had but to look with his fascinating eye, and people did what it asked of them — unconsciously.

'It is a failure,' he cried, raking the hair from his brow with nervous fingers.

‘Nonsense!’ said Theresa sharply and very prosaically. ‘You have been working too hard the last week or two: leave it alone for a while. You will find it is all right, after a little.’

It was her business in life to be prosaic. She was, she said, the lump of lead at the other end.

‘What is the matter with it?’ Lester went on, ‘Why should I fail? I!’

The passion grew in his eyes, and burst upon him, coming as some outside element, sweeping him along in its course as wind sends withered leaves scudding before its might.

‘Despair is the most subtle of expressions. I take it because it is interesting; it has so many phases, it is such a sad thing, complex and simple all at once. It should be miserable, puny, should show the miserableness of life. She should be miserable — Genevra — in that box where she is going to die. She should be in utter despair. Love, hatred, scorn, they are all so easy, — who cannot do that? A smile, a frown, — pah! so easy; but despair! it is subtle, — a contorted muscle does not give it, it does not frown, it does not laugh, it looks, it looks! But why cannot I see it? Why can *I* not lay my hand on it? See,’ he cried, with the childlike simplicity of speech that was his peculiarity. ‘Look at her, — she is as far from the thing as that panel! Why can I not do it, why have I failed? It is a failure!’ he shouted in his fury, and seizing a big brush, he swept all the paint from the palette with it, and daubed out the face, the

face that no one else in the world would have found any fault with.

Yes, he daubed it out; stamping with rage he covered the canvas with motley streaks of paint. He demolished it, he would tear it to bits, this thing that defied him, — he would tear it to bits.

Theresa caught him by the hand and turned him away.

‘Lester! Lester! leave it now!’ she said.

For a moment he stood gazing vacantly, quivering with his exertion. Then a smile grew and grew upon his face, and his eyes began to sparkle. He threw his arms round her neck.

‘I must begin again,’ he whispered. ‘It is impossible not to succeed a second time. I will begin again.’

‘Yes, begin again, of course you will succeed, — only come away just now, it is getting dark,’ she answered, caressing him and gazing at him, a great love beaming from her wizened face.

Gilbert thought that it was difficult to tell which of them was most beautiful; he, wrapt in the ecstasy of his genius, or she in the adoration of this brother. Gilbert also bent his head in admiration of him, yet there was nothing to admire in Lester: a little weakly man, emotional, amiable, very simple in ordinary life. His genius was a thing he obeyed implicitly, it led him away, away, and he followed where it took him.

He was not responsible for the actions of his genius.

CHAPTER IV

GILBERT lived rather an odd life, with Theresa's house upon the one hand, and the Tegart-Hoares upon the other. He found they did not mix very well, but he could not resist visiting Theresa, this breezy person revived him like the sweet air of the sea. Also, household matters weighed heavily upon him. He hated money and business, had been brought up to do so, and now he found himself face to face with those little tiresome, intractable figures, those jumping eights and nines, that fret the youth out of a man as the most subtle bacillus. Mr. Strode in forgetful moments would do things without telling his son of them, and unexpected bills cropped up that caused Gilbert to pull long faces over his quarterly accounts. Mr. Strode, in fact, had relapsed into his old habit of buying what he wanted, and leaving all other money concerns to those around him. Sometimes, when Gilbert hesitated to answer his demands, he flew into abuse of their poverty, and expended his anger upon the nearest recipient, as a rule, his son. And then Gilbert, thinking of his enforced idleness, his trying life, for, if it were dull for himself, what must it be to his father whose

earlier life had been wrapped in luxury and pleasure, — gave in, and made up by extra work in the evenings. As he rose in the office, he made more of course, but then more went.

So they pottered on drearily, and that house in West Kensington grew wearisome, and more wearisome. Sundry things, too, disturbed Gilbert's rest. Mr. Strode had taken to going down to Tegart-Hoare's study, and his son, remembering what had gone before, feared Stock Exchange and speculations. Only, Tegart-Hoare was a gentleman and disinterested, too shrewd a man to lead either himself or his friends into a scrape. Perhaps, Gilbert tried to think, he was a good friend for his father. Then, when Mr. Strode disappeared, he left his son in company with Ella — it was always Ella. And Gilbert was conscious of being taken possession of gently by Mrs. Tegart-Hoare. He was pressed into all kinds of services, asked to help here, to help there, to hand Bibles at meetings, to be generally useful. She wished to convert him, to lead him unconsciously to be one of them; because the simple soul wished to save him from the gay and flippant life his father had led; wished, she said, pressing his knee affectionately, that he would take the place of her own lost son. She lent him books to read, and it seemed as if he were fast becoming one of the obedient shadows that surrounded her. He submitted, for his father's sake, and waited to see where it was all leading to. He hated it, it disgusted him,

and once, when sitting *tête-à-tête* with Ella in the drawing-room, he quite suddenly made up his mind to leave the house there and then. His father was occupied as usual downstairs in the study, and he simply said that he had an engagement to keep, and must go away. Ella's face fell.

‘Must you really?’ she asked with sincere regret.

He answered yes, but as Mrs. Tegart-Hoare had a strange habit of pervading her house when at home, he met her on the stair and was stopped.

‘Your father is still here,’ she said.

‘I am really afraid I must keep my appointment.’

‘You will come and hang up those texts before you go?’

‘I really have n't a moment ——’

‘But if you wait, I will take you with me in the carriage and drop you.’

She retreated into her chin, well pleased with the prospect of a conversation with him. The fear of such an event drove Gilbert to ultimate measures.

‘Very sorry,’ he murmured, bolted past her down the stairs and was gone, before any one had time to stop him. The eldest son, emerging quietly from the dining-room, caught a glimpse of his flying figure and followed it with a half-shocked, half-longing eye. Ella was astonished, her mother gasped for a moment or two, then a dental convulsion brought her jaws together, and she murmured, ‘Poor *dear* boy!’

Gilbert hurried off, afraid of pursuit, and did not feel easy until the underground had taken him a good distance away. His impulsive nature was still trying to work its own way under the coat of calmness which circumstances had thrust upon him, and it still sometimes got the better of him. The fire is the most dangerous that works inwards. It was only that over-sensitiveness and foolishness about him that made him passively submit to be led a way he did not wish to go, to be shoved into a compartment of life he did not wish to inhabit. Then he sat down in lonely melancholy and wondered at his sadness and dreariness. Inveterate muddler; if one yet gave him a choice, he would do what his father wanted of him.

This afternoon, he went straight from the Tegart-Hoares to Theresa's.

He found some people there, but slipped so quietly into the room, that no one noticed that he had not been there all the time. He listened amusedly to the conversation, catching stray words from different groups, much impressed with the aimless, mirthless laughs that threaded the buzz of voices. It was necessary to look unutterably pleased at everything that was said; and it seemed to him that a person near him trimmed her smiles according to her bonnet, which was of a very bright and disconcerting pink.

'Have you seen — (laugh) — the newest one-man-show?' — (laugh).

'No' — (laugh, laugh).

‘Most extraordinary. Very flat and wanting in tone to my mind, but one is fearfully behind the times if one is surprised at artists’ vagaries now. I always know when a thing looks frightfully out-of-drawing that it is the one to praise’ (laugh).

Then some one else became audible to him, an emphatic, uplifted voice.

‘Oh, but you are too hard, the world must have something to gaze at, and the half of existence that is n’t the world has to provide it, or else where *should* we be, and what would we land in?’

‘Knickerbockers!’ squealed an ecstatic girl caught in the midst of an eulogy on rational dress (laugh — laugh).

‘I don’t quite understand,’ said a soft voice that struck familiarly on his ear. It sent a tingle through him and brought a vivid picture back to his memory. He raised himself in his chair; yes, Mrs. Yorke was sitting over there, not much changed by the fifteen years that had passed since he last saw her. The same indolent, smiling trifler. There was no reason why she should look older, for she had been carried through life very carefully by other people.

He sank back dreamily, remembering many things he had forgotten, seeing the sunshine of La Campagne Salève shining far away.

‘You will be a very great artist some day, Bertie.’ He started up as this echo of a voice, also forgotten, seemed to sound so closely to him. A woman was sweeping her skirts over his outstretched foot, and was saying ‘Beg pardon.’ He

rose with a smile to apologize, and she paused in turning, to look at him, a harassed endeavor to recognize him in her eyes.

‘Gilbert?’

‘Ah! Then you remember me?’ he mumbled idiotically.

‘Of course, or rather your smile,’ and she showed no disposition to go away.

He almost laughed to remember how completely he had forgotten Agatha, how glad he was to become aware of her existence again. He was astonished at the flood of conversation that came so readily to his lips, at the pleasure with which he listened to her as she recounted simply the story of her life since they had parted. She recalled to his mind this and that, laughing a little, sadly, longingly, scrutinizing with her restless eyes while she talked, all that passed before her.

‘And do you remember the great future we predicted for you?’ A mirthless smile lighted her lip for a moment. ‘I have been expecting to hear of you.’

He stiffened. ‘Instead, it is Lester you have heard of,’ he growled.

A sudden gleam came into her eyes. ‘Lester? yes,’ and she appeared to think.

He watched her, and it seemed to him that she was very beautiful. Oh, something cried within him, very beautiful. She was extremely fair; it impressed him the more, as Ella displayed an abundance of color. His eye travelled over her

masses of light hair that looked white under the black brim of her hat; her white oval face with its drooping brows, its wide mouth; her big pale eyes that wandered with an uneasy harassment over the people and articles in the room. There was a narrowness about her brow, a troubled melancholy in those never-still eyes, a suggestion of passion about her altogether that is seen sometimes in these very fair women. He conceived her in her fairness to be very beautiful.

‘We laughed at him when he was a boy,’ she said meditatively. ‘And now he is so famous!’

‘Lester? Yes.’ He went on to speak about him, and was charmed at the interest she took in all he said, and there was something so sympathetic in her close attention, that he drifted away from Lester, and, led by her little questions, spoke of himself.

‘I!’ he began; ‘oh! I have been doing nothing.’

This nothing, however, took many minutes in the telling, and, as when long ago he lay on his back under the trees telling her sad stories, her eyes filled in response and her face reflected his expression. When he had finished there was a slight pause, then she said, with a touch of coldness.

‘But, with your talents, you might have ——’

Well, of course, it was natural, that she, with her adoration of greatness and success, should feel a little scorn for a man who had fallen so short, so lamentably short of his promise.

At this moment a general stir and a quick migration to the door denoted the entrance of Lester. Agatha's restless eyes were arrested, they gazed eagerly at him, at this great artist, this painter of wonderful pictures, this hero of many dreams.

The little man stood alone, smiling to right and left, smiling very happily, for he saw a roomful of people bowing before him. He paused to talk to this person and that, and every one seemed to fall under the magnetism of his presence; every one seemed to find his simple remarks, his glances, his smiles, his gestures, very fascinating. Agatha was not disappointed apparently to find him so small, so fair; on the contrary, his power, his genius seemed only the greater; it seemed most marvellously great by contrast.

This little man, inoffensive creature enough, whose pointed face drooped under the pressure of ill-health, and whom one would pass by with a sniff in the street, had yet such a way with his brush that decided the fate of a woman's life.

One crowded round him with trivial compliments. They had all seen his last series of studies; how did he manage his combination of realism and idealism? His touch refined everything — wonderful, magnificent! *Quite* his best. How did he manage his gray monotonous, his vivid effects of white light? So charming.

Lester took it all in, and oddly enough it was sincere: to be thoroughly insincere to him was impossible, his simplicity prevented it. Yes,

he took it all in, he looked with a pleased smile round about him, and *he* was the centre of attraction. He seemed to like this.

In looking about him his eye caught an earnest face turned in his direction, and he paused to observe it. He did not paint portraits, but a rare face here and there appealed to him for some quality, as a study of an unusual expression, and then he said, 'I must paint it.' He looked again, and Theresa saw a sudden glow of interest sparkle in his eyes; he saw plainly that this pale head was what he wanted for his Genevra. He accordingly walked straight across to Agatha and entered into conversation with her without delay, unconsciously watching her as she spoke.

'You were not here last Friday?' he began amiably.

'Oh no. We have only just come home from abroad, and of course it is impossible that you should remember me.'

He did not remember her, but he said with an engaging smile, his head a little on one side,

'Really! have I known you before? I hardly think it possible, for I could not have forgotten you ——'

'It was long ago,' she murmured, confused by the steady gaze of his dark eyes. He looked at her with evident interest; the confusion was becoming to her.

'It is pleasant to remake an old acquaintance,' he said gracefully; 'very pleasant,' he added, and Agatha felt that his manner was fascinating.

But he did not talk much, he stood by and listened. It was Gilbert, shaken out of his usual reticence, that seemed to find no lack of conversation.

Then Mrs. Yorke rippled like a summer wave across the room.

‘I ought to be going,’ she said, sinking into a comfortable chair and buttoning a glove.

‘That’s conscience,’ said Graham, a youthful *protégé* of hers at the moment. ‘It’s a great obstruction in the path of life. Now my “ought,” if I have one ——’

‘Is a gobbling monster that eats the hundreds and tens and remains in open-mouthed solitude at the end of the quarter!’

‘Ah, — exactly.’

‘It’s a convenient word,’ said Theresa; ‘it represents all the good one does n’t do.’ She cast a proprietary eye at Gilbert and added, ‘You have rediscovered each other without my help, I see.’

‘What?’ said Mrs. Yorke inquisitively, ‘it can’t be Gilbert? I should never have known it! I am delighted to meet you! How is your father? Do tell me all you have been doing.’

Gilbert was embarrassed; the odd happiness he had experienced that afternoon had been of quick birth and died as easily. He determined to escape at once, and he told himself bitterly that this was what came of visiting Theresa. How was he to own that his father was a broken old man living in Penton Street?

Theresa divined his feelings from his relapse

into awkwardness, and attracted Mrs. Yorke's attention to something else.

'My dear,' said this lady when out of ear-shot, 'I should never have known him if I had n't met him here. So plain! and he was such a charming boy! He's quite uninteresting!'

Theresa was pleased; she disliked Mrs. Yorke, and would have been inconsequently put out had she admired Gilbert.

'Yes,' she said, 'he is uninteresting, and a tall man distinctly needs *something* to take one's attention off his trousers.'

Mrs. Yorke fluttered a little and was pleasantly shocked. 'He certainly has long legs,' she remarked mildly.

Almost every one went away then, and Gilbert was again aware of that atmosphere of aimless laughing, but Theresa did not allow him to slip out quietly as had been his intention.

'Do you know that you have only been here about an hour?'

'It seems a long while, — but, I would rather go, — it gives me a false position.' He blushed.

'A man's social position is not cut and dried like a woman's. Who is to know that you are not an impecunious young artist like Graham?'

He shook his head.

'Then why do you come at all?' she asked unreasonably.

'I have no place else to go,' he drew himself up and added quickly, 'that I care about particularly.'

And, yes, it was odd; but it was at Theresa's

house, through Theresa, or with her in the background, that all the events of his life happened to him, and yet it was really not her fault.

Gilbert looked back into the room and saw Agatha talking to Lester. He stayed.

‘Ah! that is it!’ Lester had just exclaimed, in answer apparently to a thought of his own. ‘You are going to live in London long?’

‘Yes, I think so. Some months anyway.’

‘You have travelled at all?’ he sat down beside her and his enticing little face was quite close to hers, lit up with a wonderful smile.

‘Yes, we have done nothing but travel for years.’

‘Ah! the south! Have you been to Algiers? Yes? One lives there! Every particle of air seems iridescent with color and heat! Life is deep-tinted there, very gorgeous. . . . It is nice. Perhaps,’ he added, seeing little reciprocation on her face, ‘you did not care for it?’

‘No, it was too much. I wanted something restful, colder, grayer. Really I am not very fond of travelling, it gives one such a homeless vagrant feeling, one makes no lasting friendships you know. I do enjoy, I would enjoy a home life, where you settle down with well-known things all round you,’ she paused to see if Lester were inclined to agree with her. She suggested thoughts of her own, which easily gave way before the decisions of others.

‘How odd!’ exclaimed Gilbert, ‘I would give anything to travel.’

‘Yes — but a woman’s instincts are home-making, are n’t they?’

‘Why, hang it, I think you are wrong,’ said Graham, ‘all the women I have ever known used home as a place to be away from.’

Agatha said no more; she dropped her light eyes and thought, or listened to the warm thrilling voice of Lester. Women generally listened to him, though he spoke low; there was that in his voice that attracts.

Then Mrs. Yorke, having put on her other glove, and finding herself ‘alone,’ told Agatha that she was really going, and impressed upon Gilbert that he *must* come and visit them, and, of course, Mr. Strobe also.

‘It has been the very greatest pleasure to me to come here,’ said Agatha as she shook hands with Lester, and he, looking into her eyes, saw that she meant it. This woman did something more than admire him; a gratified smile hovered round his lips. Somehow or another, he had never felt this pleasure in any one’s flattery, adulation, or admiration before. And she had a face that he must paint; her pale face, his intuitions told him, was the face capable of expressing that despair which had evaded his grasp; yes, yes, he trembled as he looked at her, he saw infinite possibilities in her light eyes.

‘You will come again soon?’ he asked in his form of question that was always a command. ‘I have several sketches of Algiers and these

places. And you will allow me some day to make a sketch or two of your head?’

‘Of me!’ she exclaimed astonished, and a flush of extreme joy mounted to her masses of fair hair. ‘Is it possible that you find anything in me worth painting!’

‘Paint Agatha!’ cried Mrs. Yorke, turning in the doorway. ‘Dear me, how charming! It’s an honor we shall fully appreciate. But we really must go, it is getting so late and the doctor told me to avoid night-air. Did you bring my cloak, Agatha, and my veil? Do make haste, dear, I’m shivering.’

Agatha swept from the room to fetch her mother’s things, while this charming lady descended the stair, still attended by Graham.

‘Remember me to your father, Gilbert, and do look us up whenever you have time.’

‘Yes, I hope you will come. I always used to visit you, it is your turn now to visit us,’ Agatha herself had added gracefully.

So every one went home, Mrs. Yorke tired and fretful, Agatha with a beaming eye; it had lost its restlessness; it had found something to look upon, to live upon. Gilbert went home as happily as possible. Poor eater of ice-cream, chaser of butterflies, why should he not be happy?

‘What is the pale woman’s name?’ asked Lester of Theresa as they sat over the fire together.

‘Do you mean Agatha Yorke?’

‘Ah yes, that is it. Her face — did you notice it? It was just what I wanted.’

‘ Yes, she is a good subject. There is something ghostly, unfinished, and sad about her. No wonder, with that mother.’

‘ Yes — what I wanted,’ murmured Lester.

‘ Very well, I will ask her here. I am afraid Mrs. Yorke will come too — and I do dislike her; she is as delusive as a pomegranate.’

‘ Oh,’ said Lester.

What did Theresa’s likes and dislikes matter to him as long as he had what he wanted! Perhaps he did not realize that she had any.

‘ The studio is in a dreadful mess,’ she sighed presently. ‘ Will you be working to-morrow?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ But it will do you no harm to put it off for a day and get the place cleaned.’

‘ No, I shall want the room to-morrow,’ he answered, unconscious that he caused her any inconvenience.

And then he wanted her to sit closer beside him and read to him. So she put aside her work and read till he fell asleep. She gazed at him, his fluffy hair spread out on the red cushion, and thought him very beautiful. He opened his eyes, caught her gaze, and a loving smile awoke in response. ‘ Go on,’ he murmured, and this occurred until she was hoarse.

His effect upon Agatha was strange and sudden. Her childhood, of course, had been very happy; she had lived in the world of ‘ Let’s pretend,’ which is a very happy place. Then, she admired fine clothes, great riches, big men and kings with

crowns and sceptres. All these things were very much to her, for her nature was deep, dramatic, narrow. Her narrowness of mind bound her about, and she did not always follow Gilbert in his wide flights of fancy. This narrowness is a quality, not a fault in woman; for some think it bends the forces of her nature with more energy in one direction; she is not troubled with conflicting passions, these spider-like 'instincts' and inquisitive doubts that run about the world spinning mischief; in her narrowness, her singleness, of mind she attaches her all, her passion, her love, in one place, to one being, one ideal.

Of this kind is the Mary who watches at the foot of the Cross.

But Agatha inevitably lost her kings and sceptres, and found nothing else to take their place. Her selfish little mother so careless, so happy, was not a person to replace these old dreams or foster new ones. Agatha was brought up to see life in a black coat and trousers, and it was not very lovely. So, she was an unhappy girl seeking for something she could not find, aware of a void that nothing filled. She travelled with her mother, here, there, all over the world; but her simple, gentle nature found no interest in this various turmoil of peoples and lives; she wearied, actually, for quiet, for surroundings that did not change unceasingly, with this bewildering rapidity. Her father was a restless man, but partly travelled because his wife chafed at and tired of people and things she saw too much of. This

did not suit Agatha, who, like a creeper, would better have vegetated in one spot, and clung to a supporting wall, embracing it with tendrils. . . .

She sought everywhere for this support and could not find it: she transported her old love of kings and sceptres to an intense adoration of greatness and success. A man who had achieved something, had lifted himself above the level of the common herd, who stood before the eyes of the world on a pedestal of his own making, appealed to her — her savagery perhaps. That never civilized little bit of nature that must have a wooden idol to worship, or one to demolish.

Dear little idol, that one paints with one's paints, studs with the jewels one likes best. Dear little ugly idol.

In the midst of this, she saw for the first time a picture of Lester's, and the minute she set eyes upon it, something said in her, 'This is it.' She dreamt of this picture, and thought what manner of man it must be who had such a way with his brush. Yes, she looked at the thing, and thought of the man behind it. She did not idealize the picture, but she was ready to adore the man who had painted it.

Then this afternoon she saw him, talked with him, sat beside him, saw all her idealized fancies in his little face, saw the greatness of his work in his little physiognomy, and her restless eye paused stilly in the seeing of these things.

Gilbert's short-sighted eyes had become wonderfully wide awake and far-seeing also. Quite

suddenly this fair, very pure and exquisite woman had come into the precincts of his dingy, dreary life. She was thrown with exaggerated brightness against the dull background, so suddenly. He was a very warm-hearted man, and the hardness of fate had no power to hurt the kindness of his soul. He blazed up at first contact with Agatha, and illuminated her with a light of his own making.

Dear little idol. . . .

Arriving at home, he received his father's anger for the first time with indifference, with in fact a warm amiability on his face that astonished Martha.

'Understand that it is not to happen again, — I won't have this impertinent disobedience, confounded impudence. Ella was quite upset, can't insult the Hoares, most particular matter — great importance — besides —' Mr. Strode ended in unheeded mumblings, and a good supper restored his equanimity.

Afterwards Martha heard them laughing merrily, talking, laughing, laughing; they were great company to each other at times, father and son. But later Gilbert remembered that he had work to do, and sat down to it with a sigh. Pen did not write, blotting-paper was lost — pah! this damnable poverty! His sudden glow of happiness faded as he thought of the long perspective of days at that detestable office that must pass before he could see her again. He tore up his paper in a rage and hurled it in the fire.

After that, he took another sheet and finished his work. He felt himself to be an unpicturesque, disappointing man, his little passions generally ended in the prosaically commonplace.

Next Saturday he determined he would act on Mrs. Yorke's invitation and go to see her. He had no business to and that was the charm of it.

'Gilbert, where are you going?' asked his father, turning round with one of his canaries on his finger.

Gilbert knew that the mention of Mrs. Yorke's name would only upset his father, so he simply answered that he had made an appointment which he was going to keep.

'You are always away from home now. You go out at least once a week, — tweet, tweet, pretty, pretty — without telling me where you are. I have a right to know where you go. I insist upon it. I might need you. I always do need you, besides how am I to know whether your friends are people I would approve of? I can't allow it, — most selfish of you. I can't allow it, I tell you. Do you hear?'

Mr. Strode was becoming cross, much too cross. It frightened Gilbert, and for a moment or two after an outburst, a blankness settled on his face that was more alarming. This vagueness was there now, and he murmured that he had a headache.

'After all,' Gilbert thought, 'it will do another time, and he is not well to-day.' So he stayed at home, and did everything he could think of to

bring the smile back to his father's face. And it was not long in coming, for Mr. Strode was the happiest person in the world, and his happiness was of the catching kind that infects others.

This was very good of Gilbert perhaps, and he repented it the very next time Agatha's face came before him, and haunted his dreams. Penton Street was murkier than it had ever been before, the office more detestable, the thought of the household in West Kensington unbearable.

It resulted in his journey one afternoon straight from the office to the address Mrs. Yorke had given him.

He found himself upon their doorstep, then in a hall that glowed warmly with red light, then in a drawing-room impregnated with Mrs. Yorke. There was lace and drapery and etchings everywhere, china and grotesque things to relieve them. The chief ornament in the room was Mrs. Yorke herself of course, and as she came forward to welcome him he felt himself very big and ugly, suddenly realized that his coat was shabby, and heartily wished he had not come.

'Delighted to see you, my dear boy. I am sure I am very glad you have come, for I was nearly asleep. It gets dark so early now. Agatha is out, shopping for me, I can't go out in this weather myself. Let's see. I am afraid the chairs are all small; but perhaps you can double yourself up into this one. Graham generally uses it. Your father must be proud of these inches,' and she patted him kindly on the arm, wanted to

know why his father had not come, and settled herself again in her deep chair comfortably. It was impossible to feel awkward long in her vicinity. There was scarcely a man, old or young, who was not enslaved by her charm, although, curiously enough, many women failed to perceive it. Gilbert marvelled at her youthfulness as he glanced across at her, a fair, soft, Persian kittenish creature, whose outward fur of conventionality saved her a great deal of trouble and thought.

‘I think we might poke the fire,’ she said indolently.

‘Let us make a nice blaze and be cheerful. Now will you ring the bell, — three times, or that wretched Mary won’t bring up tea till some time to-morrow. What a serious person you are, Gilbert, do let me hear you laugh. Or are you shocked at my frivolity?’

She pushed a footstool nearer the fire, and laid two little slippered feet upon it.

‘No,’ said Gilbert with his eyes on the footstool.

‘You used to laugh so much! Don’t you remember when you were supposed to see me home? What an odd old-fashioned little cavalier you were.’

‘Yes,’ said Gilbert eagerly, ‘I remember very well. And you do not look a day older.’

‘My dear boy, you have forgotten.’

‘No,’ he said as he picked up her handkerchief, ‘I certainly have not. You are a bit of that sunny landscape,’ he added to himself dreamily, keeping the soft, fine handkerchief between his fingers.

‘ You have not told me anything about your father,’ she remarked, recalling him with a jerk to himself. He said that his father had very broken health, went out very little, had, he emphasized, entirely dropped his old circle of acquaintance. It was sad, he thought as he spoke, that his father had changed so much, fallen so far asunder from his old associations, that he had to excuse him to Mrs. Yorke. He, Gilbert, had no business there either, he had no place in her society, and she would soon find that out. He bitterly determined that he would never go again.

‘ What a pity,’ said her trivial voice. ‘ One must grow old some day, I suppose. You see how much I suffer now! But your father was a sort of fairy prince: it is impossible to connect age with him. And — your mother? Ah yes!’ she sighed; but at the same moment she smiled to herself; for that, at Campagne Salève, had been one of the most amusing incidents in her life.

A servant brought in a tea-table, and Agatha followed her, her hands full of parcels. Gilbert handed Mrs. Yorke her handkerchief, with a sudden awakening to the fact that it was still in his hand, angry that, having come to see Agatha, he had stayed talking with her mother, and had been enjoying it very much. She received it with a laugh; anyway she had done better than sleep.

‘ Ah, here you are, just in time to pour out tea; but first you might go upstairs and fetch me my white shawl, or Mary can go.’ Mrs. Yorke had

a charming habit of keeping those about her running on her behalf.

Agatha shook hands with Gilbert, and sat down at the table. Then they talked pleasantly about everything and nothing, and Gilbert was surprised to find himself chattering also. He listened to every tone of her voice, and watched the fire-light gleaming on her hair.

‘My dear,’ Mrs. Yorke was saying, ‘you don’t want to go to that horrid dog-show! Well, I can’t go, and you can’t go alone. Perhaps Theresa or Graham or Terryll or somebody is going.’

‘I suppose you would not trust yourself to me,’ murmured Gilbert.

‘Oh yes! capital idea, Agatha never will go to any place with Graham,’ said her mother rising. It did not matter to her who her daughter went with so long as she had not to go herself. She left the room complaining of draughts.

And now that he was left alone with Agatha, he suddenly relapsed into an awkward silence. His fascinated eye watched the fire-light leaping up on her pale face, illuminating for an instant the masses of *blanc-cinré* hair that nearly touched her eyebrows. Neither was she much inclined to talk. She accepted Gilbert as a sort of brother whom she had not seen for a long time, and she did not feel it necessary to talk politeness to him. There was a well-being on her face that had not been there when he last saw her; a complete, full womanhood there was about her that filled him with delight.

Presently she seemed to remember that he was there.

‘ After all our great dreams, Gilbert, you —— ’

‘ I am in Stanley’s. Yes, dreams are nothing. ’

‘ But it is only temporary, I suppose. You have not given up all your old ideas completely? ’

‘ Yes, ’ he answered grimly. ‘ I — have. ’

‘ What a pity, ’ she said softly, mentally contrasting him, perhaps, with Lester. ‘ I am so sorry, for I always used to feel a sort of partnership in your doings. I looked forward to sharing the pride of your success. ’ She laughed and looked across at him with her straightforward eyes.

‘ She had felt a partnership in his doings, had looked forward to his success, ’ and he had done nothing. Perhaps she scorned him.

‘ Agatha, if I begin again, now, if I really work, you know, I believe I could —— ’

‘ Oh, yes, begin again; you are so young yet. And then — oh, yes — how can you waste yourself so at an office — haven’t you a spark of ambition? ’

This was the same Agatha that had egged him on in his boyhood.

‘ It would please you? ’

‘ Of course. ’

‘ You really take an interest in my welfare, still? ’

‘ Of course, ’ she said again, looking at him in surprise.

‘ I will do it, ’ he muttered, and Agatha felt pleased that she had roused him from his inaction.

He went away full of mighty resolves. He

would leave Stanley's; he would continue his art training; he would illustrate, in the meantime; he would win her approbation, and then he would . . .

He arrived home and found his father very angry. He retorted with a red streak of wrath across his forehead. A great many things were on the tip of his tongue. It seemed to him that he had never been so angry before, never had so much he wanted to say. He stood up straight, collecting his forces, about to hurl a vigorous, defying eloquence at his father's head, to silence that babbling stream of childish ire. But he stopped suddenly as he saw an expression of fear growing on his father's face, which quickly grew crimson with passion. He stopped and turned away — ah! he turned away. His softness was not equal to braving it out; all these unsaid things remained unsaid, and he turned away.

Why, he pondered bitterly, had he come across Agatha? Why had she in a moment roused him, seized his soul in her grasp, and held it so tightly? He had accustomed himself to his life; it would have gone on and on, endurable. Then, quite suddenly, she came and upset it all, a little curious push with her finger and she had knocked it all over. And it had been so difficult to build.

He would never see her again; he must not allow himself to be drawn into that nonchalant, money-spending society. He was poor, poor, and poor people were not given happiness. Happiness was bought, like everything else; it was not given — nothing was given.

So he came and went, came and went again, to and from the office. He crumpled his brow over the wretched money affairs that were becoming more and more entangled; he spent sombre hours with Ella, and worried over his father's odd behavior.

Oh, no! it was better that he should not think of Agatha. She had really very little to do with him.

CHAPTER V

GILBERT was with Theresa in the drawing-room. He turned his eager eyes always to the door, and was but faintly aware that she was talking. For him to be there on Saturday afternoons had become an institution; for Agatha to be there on Saturday afternoons, sitting to Lester, was another institution, and it frequently happened that they left the house together; and Theresa, knowing that Gilbert had few friends, endeavored to make the few hours he spent there every week as pleasant and home-like as possible.

It seemed to him an unutterably long time since Agatha had disappeared behind that door. He heard a slight murmur of voices on the other side, and that angered him unreasonably. Why did she stay in there so long?

Theresa was seated opposite him in an odd attitude, her skirt tucked up and rolled round her, and she was sewing with a thread that seemed to knot often. Every now and then she travelled round herself to sew another bit.

‘ In unsophisticated days I envied the ancient Greeks, and longed for draperies that are tied on with a tape or two, but now I have come to the conclusion that it must be rather irksome to

travel through life holding on one's clothes as they invariably do in pictures. I always want to know what happened when they let go,' she said.

'I expect they were sewn somewhere,' he answered vaguely, and his eye, returning from the door for a moment, fell upon a spot on his coat. It suddenly occurred to him that his coat was shabby; would Agatha notice it? Of course. Shabby! that was the most sordid word in the language, and it meant so much, just as this little spot contained in itself a history—he scratched at it furtively, the horrid stain. He thought with a shiver that Graham was always well dressed, and then he violently determined that, at all events, that cad was not going to take her home, as had already happened, once or twice. He heard Theresa chattering on, but paid no attention, and hinted that it was tea-time, and that Agatha had been sitting very long and would be tired.

She, however, did not look so. She was seated in a big chair on the platform, and Lester was making rapid sketches of her in different positions. She watched in wonder as he rubbed out his work with the duster again and again.

'It is singular,' he said to himself. 'Perhaps—the other side.'

'I wonder that you have chosen me to paint,' she murmured, 'for I have been told that I have very little expression. Do you find it so?' She lifted her eyes anxiously.

'No, not at all; you have a face that answers

when it is appealed to. That is the difficulty, you change so often.'

He turned abruptly and gazed at her so that she dropped her eyes again. Her face seemed to fascinate him, only it troubled him that she would not look as he wished her to look, and yet he knew that she could. He tried her with many expressions, but never roused that one of which he was in search.

She was silent; she seldom spoke much. Once already a whole afternoon had passed without her saying more than perhaps six words. It was so wonderful to sit up there, to be painted by him, to be the object of his regard, the sole subject of his thoughts, perhaps, at that moment; to be the means, as his model, through which the greatness of his genius was made known to the world. She watched him working, in silence. She thought that he worked very hard, and her eye roamed over the easels with half-finished pictures on them.

It might happen that some day he would realize the rich field he had to himself, for he could do with her what he liked, and she was all his.

'I think you are tired,' he said presently. 'Come down for a moment and take a rest;' he held up his hand to help her.

'All these sketches, all that work, is for nothing,' she exclaimed, pointing to the studies that he had thrown aside.

'They will not do. You — what is it about you? You never look as I wish you to! Yet,

I am certain that you could. I know it. I am never mistaken. Look at me again.'

She tried to keep her eyes steady, but they sank gradually, for she felt as though he were looking through her, through her at something beyond. Her face drooped as a withering lily on its stem as she stood before him, clearly defined against the big bare wall beyond.

'What is it? What do you see?' she asked tremblingly, a little frightened.

'Yes!' he cried. 'You *are* beautiful! Now I see that you are beautiful,' and he gazed at her rapturously.

A crimson blush grew over her face, but she answered, 'No, no, you are making a mistake; it is only you who see me that way.'

Only you! a smile of pleasure trembled on her lips as she said it.

He did not listen to her, he was buried in his own thoughts. Then he suddenly darted away to another subject; he showed her sketches and pictures. He talked descriptively of them, and kept his dark eyes upon her watchfully and disappointedly, but drinking in her praise with open ears. He sought for her to say something of each, waited for her comments; he had never been praised quite in this way by any one else, and it was very enjoyable. Undoubtedly her company afforded him a very great pleasure.

'Yes, that is a study of grayness. You like it? The sky here is often so gray; it broods over a big city and sees all its vices — all the filthiness

risers up and covers everything with its miserable grayness. Gray is the color of sadness, — you, — yes, — you are like a spirit of sadness, — like this, — see, — your hair should be looser,’ — his own nervous fingers tugged at it so that it fell down a little round her face.

Half-muttered fragments of ideas escaped him. One could see in his eyes how quickly his thoughts travelled.

‘It is like a winter’s sun in mist, a veil of tears perhaps — no, it is not despair; it will not do,’ and he sighed deeply.

It is impossible to say how long he would have kept her there; until probably he felt tired and the light failed. But Theresa went to the door and knocked when she thought it was time that he should stop, for she feared that he would over-work and over-tire himself, and Lester’s health had to be guarded with great care. Gilbert followed Theresa.

‘How have you been getting on?’

‘I have done nothing,’ said her brother a little petulantly.

‘No,’ whispered Gilbert to Agatha, ‘he has not done you justice.’

She was gathering her hair into its knot again, and simply looked up at him in silent disagreement.

‘I am sorry. You must try again another day,’ said Theresa, but Lester lingered near the easel, vaguely fingering his brush.

‘Lester, you have a headache, you are tiring

your eyes. Wait till she comes again, perhaps she will be in the mood you want her. She is not to-day ——’

‘ No, I shall not get it to-day.’

‘ Well then, dearest, will it not be better to wait?’

‘ Yes — I am tired,’ and having got him to own this, Theresa knew that he would be obedient. At times he declared that he was not tired and then no argument would move him; if urged too far he simply locked the door, and she would have to go away, to loiter outside in the passage, useless, to be told by the doctor that if she were not more careful of him she must take the consequences. She looked round the room now with a despairing eye, noting the various pictures in different stages of completion. It did not seem as if he would ever finish any of them; yet never in his life had Lester left a thing unfinished.

This afternoon, of course, Gilbert took Agatha home. Unfortunately the walk was not very long.

‘ Let us walk quick, Gilbert, I am afraid of meeting Graham.’

‘ Do you not like him?’

‘ No, not at all. I cannot understand how mamma puts up with so much of him; he is so coarse beside ——’ and there she paused.

‘ Beside?’ queried Gilbert quickly.

‘ Any one else I know.’

Gilbert took the lame conclusion to himself, and quivered with joy. Her meaning was very plain.

‘I do not care for him either,’ he mumbled, feeling a necessity to talk, even about nothing, because the way was so short. ‘His drawing is trashy stuff too, he has not even the art to make his subjects you know — only just — disagreeable. I believe he tries to imitate Lester.’

‘Imitate Lester! Would any one dare to do that?’

How warmly she always sympathized with him!

‘Oh yes, they are good for the critics, who get a dash at Lester through them sometimes. Luckily he knows nothing of it.’

‘No, these little matters are below him.’

‘Yes,’ cried Gilbert enthusiastically. ‘I never saw any one before who accepted him in the right light; he is as misjudged a man as Zola, and people try to measure him by their own little tape-measures.’

Agatha agreed very warmly to this, and added other comments of her own to which he also agreed. It seemed to him, in fact, that they always did agree warmly with each other, and Agatha entered heartily into all he said. And, great God! what a lot he said; always on the most prosaic subjects, or searching for her likes and dislikes. This eager, emphatic person, with glowing eye was certainly a pleasant companion to her, for she did not understand anything that was not earnest, and her effect upon him was to make him invariably so: if an irony escaped him she did not perceive it. He would have been very easily repulsed; most women indeed drove

him further and further into his shell by their polite, indifferent, strained manner to him. It was not so much that he was plain, but he was a bear. By which is meant, is it not, the stolid person who is apparently incapable of comprehending just those nice little things that salt life and make it tasty?

‘He is uneducated, he has no woman-kind of his own, you know. But I could educate him; he is a little heavy on hand,’ said Mrs. Yorke to Graham, who was a distant relative of her husband’s whom she was asked to ‘mother’ while he was in town to keep him from evil ways.

‘I never meet him any place, — he’s oldish I suppose?’

‘Not your age, my dear boy. Why, I might be his mother.’

‘Impossible.’

‘But do you know that I am forty?’

‘That’s only over twenty, isn’t it? I’m over twenty too. Jove! charming! I begin to like arithmetic.’

‘It is odd that you have never learnt that two and two make four, in the matter of money.’

‘I have learned that one and one make two, you know.’

‘Bad boy, I don’t doubt it.’

Mrs. Yorke jumped up from her chair saying, ‘Here they are. Gilbert seems to me to be improving already.’

She was really a very youthful looking woman; she might have been anything under thirty-four.

Gilbert lingered on the doorstep of the house, in no hurry to go away.

‘Are there any books you want changed at the library?’

‘Yes, but do not bother about it, I will go myself to-morrow.’

‘Don’t you trust me? You never used to hesitate to make use of me,’ he answered smiling.

‘You had nothing more important to do then.’

‘Nor yet now,’ he added quickly.

‘You are very obliging,’ Agatha said with her gentle smile, and disappeared for a moment to fetch some books about which she gave him instructions. And he went away well content, thinking of the frank, pleased smile she had thrown at him. He cuddled it, and fostered it, until it grew and grew in his passionate soul to just such a size as he wished it to be.

Gilbert’s even persistence had overcome Mr. Strode’s opposition, who accepted his son’s absence every Saturday afternoon now as a matter of course, and being occupied with his own affairs, did not inquire whither he went or what he did. He seemed to have forgotten that it had ever been otherwise. He was at present engaged on a work which he was going to present to one of Ella’s very Anglican aunts, a person associated with an Anglican Sisterhood which Mrs. Tegart-Hoare tolerated and gave to because, at least, it was religion. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, being so good, could not resist ‘giving’ to this wealthy charity, and in return she told her sister what the

boys wanted for Christmas presents: A telescope, a photographic kit, surgical instruments for Willie, which articles the sister gave with violent complainings to the other half-dozen sisters about expense.

Mr. Strode was employed in concocting a landscape for the chapel *crèche*. He laughed over it a great deal with Gilbert, but he could not help being charming to any one in whose presence he found himself, and the whole Tegart-Hoare household agreed that, whatever he might have been in his youth, he was a most delightful man now. Others said that one could see what he had been as a boy — some ladies' highest praise. Why of course, Mr. Strode's youth was imperishable; one could see quite well in old boy what young boy had been.

Martha objected to this landscape very much; some coals were taken from her economical little heap, and were covered with *papier-mâché* for the ground-work of mountains; next she was asked to knit very tightly some brilliant green wool that Gilbert bought, which was boiled after and fuzzed out for trees. She watched her masters in wonderment as they spent the whole evening with sleeves turned up and dirty fingers over this child's play. Mr. Strode's merry tongue wagged briskly, and sudden appreciative undertones of laughter came from Gilbert now and then. But, as a rule, he was thinking of other things, and sometimes care forced itself upon him, weighed upon his brow, and his mouth twitched in meagre response to his father's chatter.

When the landscape was finished a screen of paper was put before it, and one looked at it through a small hole.

They took it to the Tegart-Hoares. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare glanced at it askance, and thinking all these things wicked, endeavored to abstract it, but her sister accustomed to her ways guarded it vigilantly. Tegart-Hoare was interested in it, and had progressed from modelling to a discussion on art, when his wife swept past him, and he became aware of his backsliding. He stopped abruptly.

‘Marmaduke, Stark says the mare is ill, but I require the carriage. Will you go and see about it?’

The shadow disappeared.

Ella admired it, and listened with interest while Gilbert patiently explained how it was done.

‘How clever you are!’ she exclaimed, gazing at him with admiring brown eyes.

‘It is very simple,’ he answered, suppressing a yawn.

‘Frank!’ shouted Ella through the open door. ‘Do come and look at this lovely *crèche*, it’s like a doll’s theatre.’

‘Ella-h!’ gasped Mrs. Tegart-Hoare.

Marmaduke returned, and said that the mare could not be used. ‘Weight of the carriage and its occupant,’ he drawled, running his eye over his wife’s figure, so that Mr. Strode smiled and ruffled his white hair, ‘is certainly too much for

her at present. It's not altogether the weight of your sanctity that counts,' he murmured turning away.

Then he and Mr. Strode disappeared downstairs, Mrs. Tegart-Hoare and her sister went away also, and Gilbert was too much engrossed in his own thoughts to note the meaningful nods and fragmentary remarks that passed between them. Ella sat down beside the fire and crocheted. There was a nice matronly look about her when she engaged herself in a quiet occupation like this, but her talk was wearying. Gilbert suddenly asked if she played, and pleased with this attention, she swung across the room to her grand piano, and performed a carefully tutored piece or two. Gilbert sat deep in his chair and thought of Agatha: she was so unlike Ella; she appeared to him exceedingly beautiful, impossibly beautiful, as he figured her to himself in the Tegart-Hoare's drawing-room.

Agatha, also, spent her time in dreaming, it is apparently a thing that every one does. She always had dreamt, but now it was difficult to tell which was dream and which was actual, and it did not matter. People knew, of course, that Lester had chosen to consider her as worthy of his attention, that, in fact, she was sitting to him. They thereupon discovered that she was very beautiful, and she complained to Theresa that she was never left alone.

'If you get stuck on a pedestal, you must expect people to try and see what's on the top,' was

the answer, delivered with the sharpness Agatha never understood. She wondered how *he* came to have such a dreadful sister and why he loved her so much. And Theresa did not care for Agatha any better. 'One of those insipid women like tepid tea that men rave about, because they have no passions or unpleasant idiosyncrasies to disturb their selfish little souls' was her opinion.

People, of course, put Lester's choosing down to his madness, because, said the beskirted half, observing sundry male eyes turned in Agatha's direction, 'don't you think she's too pale to have the real beauty of a blonde? Her mouth is really very large, and her eyes are dreadfully light! But still, she's sweet, isn't she? if she were n't so solemn.'

Agatha vaguely wondered why she was looked at curiously by so many, but she did not think of it much, these things were outside her, quite outside; but Mrs. Yorke found the position interesting.

'I should n't wonder, you know,' said Graham, 'when you get a genius and a woman like that — they seem two oddities rather well met.'

'Poor Theresa!' whispered some one else.

These little phrases germinated and sent up shoots; there must always be something interesting where a man and a woman are concerned.

Next time Agatha went to the studio, Lester said that he had been waiting for her, — why had she not come sooner?

'I thought you were busy,' she answered.

His smile was bright, for he always seemed

pleased to see her, and with a quaint courtesy he led her to her chair. He had begun another picture of her; his intuition told him that he had here something most entirely feminine, and although she had never yet looked as he wished for Genevra, she had other interesting expressions. He had not given up his supreme idea, he never gave up anything; some day she would have to come up to his demands, to show him the despair he needed to see before he could paint his picture, unless he found another more competent than she.

‘It looks like a Madonna,’ she said when she came down from the platform, and regarded the simple figure in blue which was beginning to appear upon the canvas. ‘Only it is just a woman. What is it?’

‘It is a woman,’ he answered. He never discussed his pictures; he expected her to admire it, that was all. ‘An Eastern woman. They are more wholly women, the Orientals, than ours, are n’t they?’

Agatha wanted to know what it meant, but he was not paying attention to her, his eyes roamed restlessly over the room.

“My soul doth”—no, I forget,—Theresa will remember it.’

“My soul doth magnify the Lord”?’

‘Yes, that’s it,—but look,—look at this bust!’ he cried, calling her to a table that had been covered over. He looked up into her face waiting for her to comment upon it.

‘But why do you always want me to praise your

things, why do you always want me to say "very pretty"? — you know I can't — it's so absurd.'

He lifted his head, gratified, but at that moment an inadvertent movement of her hand shook the table, the bust rolled unsteadily, and fell with a crash on the floor.

He started, and she gazed with fear at the light that grew in his eyes.

'Broken!'

She seemed to be scorched by the hot glare of those eyes.

'Broken!'

He stamped on some fragments; he told her how precious it had been, that it could never be replaced, that she had broken it, *his* bust; he raved, he stamped, he flew up and down the room beside himself, perhaps he would like to kill her.

She did not know him, nor these terrible outbursts that came on his nervous nature; she took every word he said to heart, and such was her belief in his greatness, that she felt she had committed a sin in the breaking of this bust.

She fell on her knees and held up her hands in a shrinking from the blow she thought his clutching hands would deal her.

'Oh,' she cried, 'forgive me, I did not mean it.'

He paused, reeled a little, and put out a hand dizzily.

'He is ill,' she thought in alarm, and taking the hand led him to the sofa. He lay down, and she knelt beside him at a loss what to do. Then he opened his eyes, and saw her kneeling beside him,

and his regard fixed itself upon her face. He noticed the tears that still quivered on her lashes ; and her sorrow ; and looking at her his eyes began to sparkle again. He sat up.

‘Like that ! That is better ! Yes, — yes,’ he cried, unconscious of the fragments of white stuff that lay round his broken bust. He put his hand in her disordered hair, and lifted it gently to see her face.

‘Very beautiful !’ he whispered, caressing her, still with his fingers in this shining hair. Then he turned to his easel, and worked there in silence, the scratch, scratch of his crayon being the only sound in the room.

She, confused by the rapidity of his moods, was scarcely aware of anything but that his embrace had been round her, and that, at present, she must not move. The position was very trying, but she would have stayed there forever.

A deep silence filled the big, bare room. In the window not far from the broken fragments of plaster, Lester drew quickly ; in the middle of the floor Agatha knelt, her pale face raised to the light, a sofa of blue color near her, behind an expanse of gray wall.

When she rose to go, she begged again to be forgiven for the breaking of the bust. He gazed at her wearily for a moment and his eyes followed hers in the direction of the fragments.

‘Oh, never mind,’ he said with a regal smile, and she admired his generosity, his greatness of nature.

The sittings were interrupted for a week, for

when she came again, accompanied this time by her mother, the studio was being cleaned, and Lester had been told by Theresa that he was not well enough to work. The windows were open and clouds of dirty charcoally dust swirled in the air, and it was evident that she was not wanted. However, Lester appeared in the dining-room doorway, and seeing her, found a million little things to say and do that kept her there for the afternoon. When he was not occupied in his studio, he was busy over little things that never came to any apparent finish, nor had any apparent object, things that sometimes even appeared somewhat foolish. He was extremely sociable when not working, and did not care to be left alone; Theresa felt therefore relieved that Agatha should take her place.

Gilbert arrived as usual and helped Theresa in the studio, while Mrs. Yorke hovered round the door, issuing a mild flood of gossip, endeavoring to entice Gilbert into an entertaining conversation. But finding him too preoccupied, she resolved to go away.

‘Do let me do something,’ she turned to say with an aimless flutter of lacy sleeves. These little gestures of hers gave a confiding birdy impression, a fluffy dependence upon others that was charming — quite too charming.

‘And now,’ said Theresa when she was gone, ‘let us work a little. I think that board may be entrusted to the servants, and can you reach the shelf without steps? You should be a librarian,

Gilbert, your faculty of reaching high shelves would be appreciated.'

He looked down at her, about to answer, when the sound of Agatha's voice came from the distance, and at that such a transparent happiness shone on his face that it attracted her attention.

'What are you looking so silly about? Do you contemplate suicide or marriage?' and then, being extremely businesslike when at work, she added with a whisk of her apron, 'Come, come, pile these loose pages together, to be thrown away.'

But presently, it seemed to her that he was peculiarly silent, and turning sharply she saw him sitting, his legs stretched out before him, the unsorted heap at his side, six or seven sketches upon his knees.

'I should have remembered how useless a man always is. I had an erroneous conception that you were useful.'

He started. 'Are all these — to be — thrown away?'

'I think I said so half-an-hour ago.'

'Oh,' and he began mechanically to sort them out.

'Why?'

'Oh nothing.'

'I must help, I suppose. It's odd, but I always have to do my own business in the long run. Agatha, Agatha, Agatha, bless me how many more, — what, — *Gilbert!*'

Theresa stood up and quivered like those dolls on wires that go by machinery.

‘Oh, don’t take them from me!’ he cried piteously, and falling on his knees he sought for them with eager hands.

Then for a quarter of an hour he held forth to Theresa, his hot face close to hers, a general air of emotion and gesticulation about him that reminded her of his foreign blood. She listened, — and an under-current of other thoughts occupied her at the same time. This sort of thing was not for her, even if she wished it; this terrible happiness of youth was as far away from her as though she had never been young. Perhaps she envied him his one freedom, the freedom to love like this, with his whole soul, his whole being. But she had Lester still, she regarded him with an unnecessary sadness, for after all, it had nothing to do with her.

‘Yes,’ said Gilbert, with an idiotic smile, ‘I am happy.’

Ah! ah! *Petit papillon bleu!*

Looking at him, his excited eyes thinking of the hopelessness of it, of this poor wretch daring to love his Agatha, Theresa internally doubted the verity of this statement. Then, also, she knew that he had no lack of energy, in perverted causes, no want of a will which he used wrongly; a very warm tender heart, but a diseased thing that went all wrong. His emotions burnt into him and they were very fierce, and she wondered where the folly would end. ‘He is so upside-down and inside-out and wrong-way-round and pig-headed,’ she meditated.

She proceeded to lecture him ; she pointed out that he was poor, that he did not live in Agatha's society, that he only came to her, Theresa, as an old friend, quite independent of society, that Mrs. Yorke would most certainly object, that, in fact, it was an utter impossibility. And then she brutally wanted to know whether Agatha had given him any encouragement. He poured such a torrent of evidence of this fact upon her that she retreated into silence.

What a lot of life one lives in a month sometimes, how one races along, so happy, so reckless, chasing — chasing a blue butterfly.

All this time Agatha was with Lester, and when Theresa saw her sitting beside Gilbert on the sofa at tea, with the same shining, far-away eye that she had noted in him, she concluded, that their happiness was horrid to look on at, and relapsed into a morose silence. 'He looks as handsome as he used to be,' she said to herself with a snarl.

'Will you take my arm, it is so slippery?' said Gilbert to Agatha when he took her home. She did so, and he felt the little gloved hand on his sleeve.

'Don't be afraid,' he added, as she felt for her steps. 'I'm here, I will hold you up, lean on me,' saying this the radiant but short-sighted boy slipped and tumbled himself.

Agatha laughed a little, and said, 'I hope you have not hurt yourself, are you quite sure?'

How thoughtful she was !

'I am afraid you will not depend on me now.'

‘Yes, I do, that was only an accident. I always feel safe with you, you are so big,— or, at least, tall.’

And this delighted him.

Somehow it never entered into his head to doubt that she returned his love. It did not matter, he was quite happy in the fact that he loved her, and her conduct had never been such as to give rise to any doubts.

A month, two months glided by, unnoticed by every one, every one was busy. Mr. Strode smiled and talked to Tegart-Hoare in the study; Tegart-Hoare talked to his wife, she to Ella, Ella to Gilbert, and Gilbert to himself; he was generally half-asleep when Ella spoke to him. On the other hand he found much business concerning Agatha; he had slid into a place beside her. He it was who did this and that for her and her mother, particularly, somehow, for her mother. Mrs. Yorke took advantage of what she conceived to be his excessive good-nature to make a slave of him, and having achieved this, she discovered he was one of those people that improve upon knowing. Agatha grew to depend upon him also; he was always there to do these little things that no one else wants to do. ‘Oh, ask Gilbert, he is sure to know,’ one grew into the habit of saying, and it saved a great deal of trouble. He fetched and carried and was happy; he did not speak much, for he read in her smile her kindly welcome of him, all that made words seem, to him, unnecessary. She accepted him without a thought, liked his company, and — well, of course, he was

as a brother to her. She asked him innocently why he never came when other people were there, on 'At home days,' and he mumbled that he could not get away from the office. He took his three weeks' holiday at a time of year that the other clerks did not want it, for since he could not afford to go into the country now, it did not matter. He spent them in a happy and unhealthy manner, travelling by underground between Penton Street and Holland Park, in which locality both the Schellless' and Mrs. Yorke lived. He saw a great deal more of Agatha than ordinarily, for Lester was ill, and consequently had no need of her. Gilbert put her absent-mindedness and dreaminess down to everything but this circumstance.

Yes, Lester was ill, and Theresa became unbearable to every one.

'What time is it?' he would ask, after Theresa had spent hours in vainly endeavoring to interest him in something.

'Half-past three.'

He lay gazing at the ceiling.

'The bell keeps ringing,' he remarked presently.

'People leaving cards I expect. Does it annoy you?'

'Oh no,' but he seemed to have a thought in his mind that he did not utter.

'I think perhaps I had better do this or that,' she would say half to herself in the hopes of catching his ear.

'Don't trouble,' he would reply drearily.

Then she would do something else; she would get Caspari to come with his violin and play some of his exquisite music in the next room. This was found to be too exciting for Lester; it did not soothe him or send him to sleep, it touched the hair-spring of his being and sent all his nervous little wheels revolving giddily. And then having nothing better to do, he gazed at Theresa, and discovered that she was plain.

‘What a pity it is that you are not prettier,’ he said.

‘But you love me in spite of that?’ she asked anxiously, her face more than usually puckered with pain.

‘Yes, of course,’ he answered with a loving smile, and she was repaid for a day of wearisome attendance upon his every wish and want.

The Yorkes came to ask after him, and he, hearing their voices, called to Theresa that he would like to see them, and she found him tranquil after the visit.

‘I suppose he gets tired of me, always me, yes, it is natural; still it is horrid that other people should have so much more effect on him than I.’

Agatha pleased Lester. Her face was a continual delight to him, and he told her often that she was beautiful. He seemed to miss her when she was not there, and looked for her coming, perhaps because he read unconsciously her admiration of him in her eyes; at all events her presence filled him with a sense of complete satisfaction.

She offered him her all; he took it. What did he give her in return? One does not ask these questions about a genius. He would never do any one any harm, this simple little man, and he would not wrong this woman who, like himself, was quite unconscious of the clacking tongues of on-lookers. He found a pleasure in her company, that was all, and since his wishes had never been denied him, he pursued his pleasure. She sat at his feet, adored and dreamt. Let us bejewel the eyes of our idols. . . .

When he was again at work, he went on with her picture, but she did not recognize it as herself when it was finished. He had idealized her, but that he should do so pleased her. This was not, of course, the picture he had in his mind; *it* was still unpainted.

People insulted Agatha by telling her that it was really very like her. Then they went away and shrugged a shoulder.

‘Who but Lester Schelless could conceive *her* in such an attitude, with such an expression? She, so quiet, so singularly lacking in ordinary conversation, so awfully commonplace! Unless it was all underneath. Of course, some people were very deep, and, anyway, all this had lasted nearly four months . . . did any one know that Strode? He seemed to share his brotherly terms of acquaintance with the two families. Wasn’t it odd? Of course he always had been at Theresa’s, but he was so often seen with the other. In fact, it is evident. . . . You know, she seems rather. . . .

Unless she does something decisive now. . . . ' People were enjoying themselves in a little harmless gossip. Gilbert and Theresa were as unaware of this enjoyment as Lester and Agatha themselves.

But business crowded upon Gilbert. In the midst of his mad happiness, his worldless dream that was without time, past or future, came quarterly bill-time, and he descended to earth on an unpleasant switchback of broken dreams and half realities. His father's irritability frightened him, for the doctor had told him its portent, so he hid all the bills, and chattered brightly. But he could not keep it up, and night after night he crumpled his hot brow over these figures. They grinned at him, with their fingers at their noses. ' You have not been attending to us,' they said; ' and so he, your father, has put us all on the wrong side. You can't do it, you can't put us back.' A nought and a nought and a nought — these little, wide-open mouths of poverty, when they do not swell the train of a chubby leading-figure. Gilbert gazed in dismay, in utter despair. He sat for a full hour one night thinking, apparently, and every minute of this hour traced its mark upon his face. Once more a tumbling of idols, — no, a selling of them; once more the filthy, stinking rag of reality was stuck under his nose.

' Oh! Oh!' cried his poor, sore heart.

' Oh! Oh!' yelled the open, empty-mouthed noughts. Everything had tumbled into the gutter.

The luxury of love had to be paid for like everything else. So he spent a whole night with his books spread before him, his hands lying idle beside them, staring vacantly.

For a week or two Gilbert hid his gray face in Penton Street. He found a vicious joy in the thought that Agatha would miss him and wonder at his absence. She had shown such a sympathy in all his concerns that now he felt she would be gently offended at his neglect. That he was to her all that she was to him the sanguine dreamer never doubted. He was, of course, like every one else, fully occupied with himself. Self is such a big thing that you cannot see round the corner of it sometimes.

Another trouble fell on him — or he awoke to it. He was standing one day in the hall at the Tegart-Hoare's in a little side passage to escape the notice of the mistress of the house, who came and went in her usual perambulations about her domain. He was waiting for his father, had been waiting for three-quarters of an hour with dull patience, listening to the sounds about the passages. It was a silent place, for its thick carpets deadened footsteps, but there was a soft patter of people coming and going, an opening and shutting of doors, sudden bursts of Phil's or Ella's voice in the schoolroom, and the sibilant whisper of Mr. Tegart-Hoare's never-ending conversation was always audible. Also, he heard his father's voice in the study.

‘Bent has threatened to foreclose. You know

what that means to me,' Mr. Strode was saying excitedly. 'Of course, I do not allow Gilbert to meddle in these matters.'

'No?' drawled Tegart-Hoare leisurely, with the undertone of irony that always permeated his voice. 'Then you are ——'

'We are ruined, we are ruined! my dear friend. We have no pos-possible means of meeting this mortgage. Not heavy, of course, at all — arrears of interest and all that — but I am quite unable to meet them.'

Gilbert knew from the tone of voice what a very fascinating expression of countenance accompanied his father's words.

'Henry will have nothing to do with it. He hates me. He always was an awful ass.'

'Precisely,' murmured Tegart-Hoare.

'He said in his letter that he would make Gilbert an allowance in case of his marriage.'

'You gave him the idea of that, I suppose?'

'Well, I mentioned that there was such a possibility; but at present, of course, he had no capital to marry on. Then he wrote to Gilbert. I took the letter. He said he was quite willing to give so much, if it aided him to make an advantageous marriage. He will do nothing more. The idiot does n't see that it's only present difficulties I'm suffering under. He calmly says that he has nothing whatever to do with my business affairs. I — I believe ——'

'He, then, proposes to make that up?'

'Yes, yes.'

‘Gilbert inherits his property?’

‘His everything—his everything. It’s only this matter with Bent, and a few other little debts that are not pressing. But Bent — Bent! Help me, my dear friend, help me. Consider my terrible position. What am I to do? You are the only friend I have left on earth. You know what it must cost me to ask for help — it is nothing to you, and, of course — only a present obligation — afterwards ——’

‘Well, she has so much, — yes, sit down. Of course I shall see to it. One condition, — I take Bent into my hands completely. There is no need for you to — ah — trouble about it further just now. She is not likely to marry any one else. It is not what could be called a business transaction, but in the cause of friendship these things are not considered,’ added Tegart-Hoare generously, with his eye, trained by his wife, turned upon the future, where he saw his *gauche* daughter installed as mistress of Henry’s English and French properties. Ella, plain and awkward and untaking, brought up, too, in a circle of society that was peculiar to Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, and that embraced gentlemen of good family or title who only visited her with religious intent, — Salvation Army captains — Ella had not much chance of marrying, except, perhaps, some clergyman with no property in view but his portion of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Strodes at this moment were very poor; a heavy mortgage that Mr. Strode raised upon

his house, during his transactions in the city, a few years ago, had fallen due, and this meant entire bankruptcy, as he could not even pay the accumulated interest, Gilbert's money having been spent as it was earned, and before. Ella had enough money to make the life of her husband quite comfortable, and she could of course, once Bent was disposed of, tide her husband and his father over their present difficulties. Mr. Strode, well aware that Bent was not the only cloud on his horizon, although by far the greatest, had had his eye upon this for some time. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, seeing that Ella would gain prospects, that poverty (she considered her daughter's dot as such) would perhaps have a good effect upon her, for at present her lapses from religion caused some anxiety, Mrs. Tegart-Hoare having looked on the circumstances all round, having considered that Ella's poverty would not entail living in an unbecoming manner; that Gilbert was a grave young man, in Stanley's too, of which there was no need to be ashamed, if people asked to whom Ella was married; that they were of very good family — Mrs. Tegart-Hoare conveyed to her husband, that she thought the match proper and suitable. 'We must extend our charity, our fellow-feeling to all who need it, Marmaduke. Mr. Strode we know is repenting for the follies of his youth, let us aid the stray sheep, — such a very charming man. Ella loves Gilbert, we must not thwart the dear child, and I am sure he is very worthy. And,'

added the simple soul, with naïve frankness, ‘I fear she will not have again such an opportunity with a young man of prospects.’

‘Your faith in the future is generally practical, Emma,’ returned Marmaduke. ‘The prospects on the whole are worth considering, and the outlay for it, — small, — quite unimportant.’

She suspected him of saying something that was wicked. So it happened that Gilbert heard these scraps of conversation outside the study door; but he did not hear the whole, he only heard enough to awaken vague suspicion, that his father had been deceiving him, had been concocting affairs of his own with that cunning that had come on him since his illness. What had he been doing, and why had he kept it secret? His father had deceived him, his father, his father. . . .

Mr. Strode came out of the study with a radiant smile; there was a bow, a laugh, a jump of his little silver ringlets as he said good-bye to Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, and she watched him depart with a very amiable display of teeth.

At home, Mr. Strode found his chatter was received in dead silence on the part of his son, and this irritated him.

‘What do you mean by reading the newspaper when I am talking to you?’

Gilbert laid it down, and turned a thin, gray lined face obediently to his father.

‘Well!’ said Mr. Strode.

‘You were busy with Tegart-Hoare this afternoon?’

‘What of it, what of it? I may talk to Tegart-Hoare when I choose, I suppose! learn not to meddle in things that don’t concern you.’

‘You have told me nothing about it!’

‘And is it necessary for you to know every blessed thing that goes on around you? Is it necessary for you to inquire into all your father does? I am not such a fool as I look yet.’ He smiled cunningly, a little shamefacedly.

‘But, — well, — we’re all we have to each other, you know, we two. I always think of you first, — and you me, — don’t you? If this business concerns me — and it must since it concerns you, — why don’t you tell me? why do you make a secret of it? Oh don’t keep anything from me,’ and he caught his father’s hand and looked in his face with a great love.

Mr. Strode snatched his hand away, and worked himself up into one of his dangerous passions; he swore, he defended himself pitifully, and ended in sobs. Yes, he cried, and leant against the shoulder of his son, who soothed him. Suddenly, in the midst of it all, Gilbert thought of Agatha, and he loved her more than ever before, and she shone brighter and brighter against this dreary back-ground.

CHAPTER VI

AND so it happened that after the lapse of a month, Gilbert suddenly turned up at Theresa's. He had gone first to Mrs. Yorke's door, and his courage had failed him; he had almost a dread of meeting Agatha; but recent events had pushed him, pushed him, he had almost run there, and when he arrived, he — turned aside. After a long, dark month of dreams, that had risen to such a pitch as to drive him forth at all costs, after that to be so near her, so near the possibility of seeing her, — he ran to her door and turned aside.

He went with no distinct feeling whatever, except a need of seeing her, and a vague instinct told him that if he saw her, he would say all that had been held back in his silence so long, he would commit unutterable follies, and he in his shabby coat had no right to commit them. So at the last moment, he turned aside from the door.

It seemed to him as he went away, that all the doors of the houses were very tightly shut against him. He was shut out and it was cold. Slinking along the pavement beside him was a thin cur, its tail down, its skin shivering over its protruding ribs. Now and then it gazed wistfully

down the area steps of a house, but all the doors were shut. It, too, was out in the cold. Gilbert became conscious of his companion, and eyed it with fellow-feeling. It had been a handsome retriever once no doubt, at any rate it was no mongrel. Its coat was scabby and brown, its face savage, and one of its legs had been broken by a kick, like as not.

‘Boy,’ said Gilbert, making advances.

The beast came up and sniffed at him with lifting lips, and when he raised his hand it cowered from him. But it did not bite him, it recognized him as a friend of its kind, moreover, had been a gentleman once, and retained a fragment of manners.

They walked on again, and the dog followed Gilbert as though he were its master.

Habit took him to Theresa’s door. He went in almost absent-mindedly; but this door, too, was shut to the dog. Gilbert turning round saw it still there, and remembering that he had a packet of sandwiches in his pocket that he had got for his father’s supper, flung it out.

It unfortunately happened that every one was at Theresa’s that day, for she had announced her departure from town, and given a big At Home ‘to prevent them coming by twos and threes at the last while I’m packing,’ she said.

When Gilbert entered, a very vivid remembrance of the first time he had met Agatha there, five months ago, came before him. Yes, he was listening to that voice again, and he felt the blood

rise to his temples in response to it. He lingered outside the door, his hand was on the handle, when he reflected that he would have to open it, which would attract attention to him, and he retreated quickly to the studio. He could breathe here, in this big, bare place, dark in the half-light of drawn curtains. A bright gleam came through the curtains that separated it from the ante-chamber, and from beyond the ante-chamber came a buzz of conversation. He stood with his ear at the chink, listening to the voice that was as clear in his ear as the drops that fall from above in a cascade, mingling with the deeper notes of other waters. Then it ceased. He waited impatiently, but it did not begin again. He must glide into the room from the ante-chamber. He must make her speak again, to him. Yes, oh yes, she must speak to him, and he clutched the curtain to draw it back; caught it roughly in an eager shaking hand. Suddenly he let it drop again, and turned away hurriedly. He would go home, go home at once. . . .

The door opened over there, and the rustle of a woman's garment told him some one else had come into the room, and he could not go. In a minute he saw the shine of her pale hair. Exquisitely beautiful she appeared to him in the blue gloom of the half-lit room. Her hair was silver almost, her face white, and he could see the expression of her wide mouth. He leant forward and stared and stared; all the very unwise things that he had not said yet rushed to the tip

of his tongue, and he would say them now. What had she come there for? To see him of course. How did she know that he was there? Had seen him on the stair perhaps. No, he knew that was not it; but she had come to look for him.

‘Agatha,’ he tried to whisper; but his voice sounded loud and jubilant. ‘Agatha.’

‘Oh!’ and there was a moment’s pause.

‘You did not know that I was here?’

‘No! you startled me. Why are you in here? Were you in the other room? Surely I have not seen you for a long time.’

‘But I will explain, — forgive me.’

‘Yes,’ she answered simply, very vaguely. ‘I missed you.’

‘You are not angry with me? I will ex — explain.’

He put out a hand to take hers; he stuttered, and stumbled over the crowd of words that tried to fight their way between his teeth, and his teeth seemed to close tighter and tighter upon them. He was so happy, so terribly happy, in the knowledge of all he was going to say, and she was waiting, evidently waiting, and the deep silence that only comes where living things are fell upon them. From the other side of the curtains came the murmur of voices, flippant voices, the clink of tea-spoons, that gleam of bright light. He was conscious of the figure beside him. He could just distinguish her pale head, and he shivered with ecstasy.

The door at the end of the room opened again,

and Gilbert had not yet said a word of all that he was going to have said. Some one came in.

Agatha suddenly stirred. It almost seemed indeed as if she had suddenly awakened from a sleep or a dream. She left his side, he felt her go, and he raised his hand to detain her. 'Come back, come back, I have not said it yet, listen;' but she had left him, and he heard the swish of her dress as she moved quickly away. He started forward to follow her, and then suddenly remembered that some one else was there, and paused.

'Ah!' he heard her sigh — a sigh replete with joy — with supreme content. 'Ah!' she sighed, and a voice he knew replied. It was Lester's.

He shrank back; but he heard their voices still as they talked together. . . . Yes, he heard them, and he heard Lester's first word. . . . He shrank back into the folds of the curtain; but it seemed to him that these voices followed him, and whispered closely in his ear, . . . or was it the voices that came from the other side? There, there was talking, and light, and that pervading laughter; he had heard it all before, this wearisome talking, — was there not even somebody saying:

'Have you (laugh) seen the latest one-man-show?' (laugh).

There came a pause, a dead silence, as if they, too, were listening to the low sounds that came from the gray gloom behind.

'Ah!'. . . the moisture rolled from his forehead.

Then a great burst of laughter — ohé! how gay they were in the drawing room.

‘What a pity Mr. Schelless missed that!’

‘I suppose it is on account of his health that you are going away so early this year?’

‘Yes, — partly.’

‘Where is he — is he not well?’

‘Oh yes,’ Theresa said. ‘He should be coming.’

‘No, no! he is here, here.’ Gilbert thought that he had cried it aloud; but no one seemed to have heard him. Theresa did not know that there was any one in the gray room there. She laughed and talked unconcernedly.

Gilbert stood in the doorway, and slowly dropped the curtain behind him. He stumbled through the ante-room, and slid noiselessly into the drawing-room, into the bright light, amongst the chattering throng. He stood a moment, and listened again; he had a great deal of listening to do to-day. A little group, out of sight round the angle of the wall, was gossiping in undertones.

‘Yes, gone on for five months, nothing known as yet.’

‘Perhaps, as usual, something will happen out of town. It will need to.’

‘But that other fellow disappeared.’

‘Oh, no! I’ve seen him about, I think. The most outrageous flirtation I ever saw.’

‘Oh well, we don’t know, you know; but she must be either unutterably simple or — t’ other way round.’

‘Never trust these blondes.’

‘Oh it’s t’ other way round, of course.’

‘ Well, there are none of them shy about performing in public. Every one knows, and if she does n’t do something decisively soon her reputation —— ’

‘ I do not think, anyway, that we should discuss it in Theresa’s drawing-room. ’

‘ I am sure, ’ muttered one moving nearer, ‘ that it will end scandalously. ’ Gilbert stood, listening to these light-hearted gossipers, and conceived their words to be laden with deep, malignant import. Somewhere in his poor distraught head these words took root, and it seemed to him that they menaced a danger to Agatha. . . .

This was Graham, who as he spoke moved towards the entry to the ante-chamber. ‘ Let ’s go in here, and have a look round quietly. It will be cool. ’

But Gilbert was there, and did not move aside to let him pass. He saw very distinctly the lifted eyebrows and sneering mouths. In such esteem was held his Agatha.

‘ Excuse me, but Miss Schellless told me she did not wish this room used to-day. The doors have been opened by mistake; the blinds are down, ’ said the sentinel haughtily, and he seemed to Graham of most unusual height.

‘ Oh, ’ mumbled this gentleman, ‘ that ’s a nuisance, but one may go in the hall I suppose? ’

Gilbert stared at him vacantly; he was certain, quite certain that he heard sibilant whispers behind him approaching — from the studio. He opened his eyes, looked about him with a frightened glare and bolted from the room.

‘ Devil!’ said Graham.

‘ My dear boy, do I hear you swearing?’ said Mrs. Yorke amiably. *

Gilbert walked all the way home, and it was only instinct that took him there. He walked and walked for miles and miles and time was endless. Agatha! Agatha! something had happened, — what! — no, she did not love him. He laughed, he wondered why he laughed, it was so odd, was n’t it? She loved Lester; Lester was a great man, he was successful — he — he was nothing, and he was quite alone. There was a great crowd round him, he smelt it, there was a flashing of lights, a laughing, a talking, the turmoil of many people, and he was alone; she had turned from him, and gone away, and he was alone. He walked quickly, he pushed rudely past people, and oaths were hissed in his ear, one, two, Agatha loved, Agatha loved this genius — Lester — one, two, Agatha loved, — so he walked, marching mechanically to a rhythm. I am alone, alone, alone, one. . . .

There followed a darkness, and then the nightmare went on. A loud voice said in his ear that he had wronged her, had brought her to the very verge of scandal. He struggled with the voice, he shouted that he had as much right to love her as any one. Surely he had done nothing to merit all this! — for long he had been so miserable, surely he might be happy a little while? Then he was in a street and all the doors were shut to him, there was one where he knocked and knocked

and it did not open; the voice said, 'She won't open to you. She does n't want you,' and he hurled himself at the door and tried to break it, but some one pulled him away and made him march, one, two, one, two. I am alone, alone. After that a hurly-burly of figures danced before his eyes, and he fell to making sums. They changed continually, these horrid figures, they would not work right; the answer was always one, two, one, two.

'Well, I will go away now. Yes, yes, don't excite yourself, no reason at all,' said the doctor to Mr. Strode with the imperturbable patience that medical men learn. 'And I can trust your discretion to see that no one makes any disturbance, eh?'

Martha opened her eyes at that, but Mr. Strode smiled and nodded importantly, and to his old servant's astonishment returned quietly to his room.

'Now, Martha,' he said with a frown, 'no noise.'

'You see,' said the doctor with a laugh, 'he is quite safe.'

Mr. Strode's anxiety during his son's illness had upset the whole household and Martha had had special charge of him. He loved his only son, and became conscious of his dependence upon him when he was no longer there. He had a fear of illness, but hovered about the room, half angry, half frightened when Gilbert did not know him. 'What, what? how is he now, eh?' until the nurse, being only an ordinary person,

grew almost angry, and the patient doctor was sent for to establish peace. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare considering them now as in her possession, gasped a little at the poverty their home displayed and sent many luxuries. She enjoyed it, it was so nice and satisfactory to see the good one did. Theresa at once dispatched a nurse, and Mrs. Tegart-Hoare sent another, in case that person was not reliable. But still, for a week or two these things seemed useless, Gilbert having been for some time over-worked and under-fed. One marvelled that Mr. Strode did not bring on one of his dangerous attacks, but it seemed to Gilbert when he opened his eyes and saw him again that he was frailer, more bent, more childish.

‘Well, my boy!’ he cried joyfully, approaching the bed. ‘Make haste and get well, now, eh? Your poor old father has been long enough without you.’

It was a beautiful, lovable father this though, Gilbert thought, who patted the pillows with a helpless attentiveness, his eye dewy with emotion.

Gilbert progressed very slowly towards recovery and Mr. Strode did his very best to vary the tedium of the day. But his son did not respond, he lay still and answered when he was spoken to, he said ‘thank you’ when things were given to him, and smiled with a politeness that was baffling. It was hard, he thought perhaps, that he had lived.

‘What is the matter with him?’ cried Mr. Strode impatiently.

‘It takes time,’ said the doctor. ‘You must leave a man to recovery in his own way you know. Er—he is perhaps nervous, easily upset?’

‘Oh no, I assure you, never was ill in his life, never had my nerves!’

‘Had mental worry lately though?’

‘No. Oh, I kept everything that could disturb him from him,’ said Mr. Strobe hastily.

Then he went to Gilbert and asked him why he still lay in bed, he, his father wanted him, missed him, could not get on without him, and Gilbert sat up and said that he was much better. He thought, too, of the household books and accounts, he remembered the state they had been in when he had gone over them before he was taken ill, and all day long the detestable subject haunted him persistently. He calculated the expense of his illness and—it was very hard that he had not died, he was so near it, and it would have been so easy. It would be easy still, so very easy; one would fall asleep never to wake: unutterable bliss! never to wake. He did not sleep much, but still he had the sensation of waking. He felt it coming, dreaded it, tried to evade it, but still it came, a big thing, a ghoul, with the myriad faces of life smirking over its shoulder. And yet it could be so easily evaded, he could sleep so that it would never happen again.

‘Well, Gilbert, my boy, how are you this morning?’ His father. No, it was evident he must accustom himself to the waking. There was his father.

One morning he gave Martha the key of his desk and told her to bring it to him; she only obeyed after a good deal of resistance. He opened it slowly and turned over the accounts; he was angry to find that the figures jumped and danced before his eyes, and he saw stars instead of them. One—two, and at that his pencil twirled in the air, when the book was snatched from him. The doctor had unfortunately discovered him.

‘None of that.’

‘I am afraid I must.’

‘Pooh, my dear fellow, nonsense. Consider others. I don’t suppose they want another dose of nursing. You will be well enough in a week for this sort of thing—otherwise, not for a month or two.’

Gilbert’s eye still rested on the book.

‘No use worrying about it. You must have a holiday. The longer the better.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘You will be all right once you are away. The country is delightful in early summer.’

‘Yes,’ said Gilbert with a polite smile.

He had noticed that his father’s manner towards him, affectionate as it was, was curious. He blushed, hesitated, ruffled his hair, and finally went away without having said what was evidently in his mind. Gilbert waited in feverish anxiety for it to come, and when his father appeared that afternoon with an odd, half-eager, half-frightened expression on his face, he saw that it was coming at last, and tried to look as if he suspected nothing.

‘What! not up? Not so well to-day?’

‘I did not know what time it was.’

‘Oh — ah, Gilbert!’ Mr. Strode hung his head a moment. ‘Gilbert, we are,’ he cried excitedly, ‘we are completely done for.’

Gilbert clutched the bed-clothes.

‘Bent has threatened to foreclose. He has only allowed us a month. Gilbert, you will not see me ruined; you will help me, my boy. I haven’t a penny, you know. We must do something, do something, eh? What? Why should I be a prey to all these misfortunes?’ babbled the old man, on his knees beside the bed.

Gilbert had not a word to say, and his father did not know how to go on. He was acting, but, as usual, sincerely; he knew that it was all settled and arranged, but at that moment he felt as if blank privation still stared them in the face. Why was the boy so indifferent?

‘Gilbert,’ he said, a little petulantly; ‘I—I have an idea. Are you attending? You don’t care, apparently. I might have known, you ——’

‘No, no, I was thinking. What is your idea? Your ideas — are always better — than any one else’s.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Strode, glancing up. ‘It is a very good idea. My dear boy, I have long noticed that you are very fond of Ella, and I thought that perhaps — she has money — it would save us if you ——’

‘If I married her?’

‘Yes, yes. Have you been thinking of it?’

How fortunate. Tegart-Hoare has really behaved very nicely. He has helped us as regards Bent, but I feel under no obligations to him, because he wants our name, you know, he! he! He is a sly beggar. Afterwards, when you are in Henry's shoes, eh, Gilbert? She is a nice girl. Her money will make us quite comfortable. And so you really love her, my boy?'

Gilbert gazed at the foolish, cunning face at the bedside. 'Yes, yes,' he murmured, 'I will—marry Ella.'

His father rose, looking bright and happy.

'Think what her money will be to us! I was never meant for poverty. I can't stand it! I am delighted, Gilbert. It is as good as a book. I am sure it will hasten your recovery. We shall have a good deal to do, you know.'

Gilbert turned away from the radiant face and lay over to the wall. Mr. Strode was extremely astonished when in the evening his son was worse—had, in fact, a relapse, that pulled him back to where he had been a week or two ago.

'He has been agitated, and I thought I told you to be careful, or else you will find it dragging on and settling into chronic invalidism.'

'I gave him some news I did not think could do him any harm. Joy never kills, you know,' returned Mr. Strode, too happy to pay much attention to the doctor's threat.

When Gilbert was better again Mrs. Tegart-Hoare came to see him, and was very kind, very impressive. First of all she prayed in thanks for

his recovery, and wished him to repeat a prayer after her. He was, however, seized with such a fit of coughing that it was found impossible.

‘My dear Gilbert, I understand that you wish my daughter in marriage. This pleases me — in fact, I feel that I cannot thank God enough for having brought such a worthy man across Ella’s path. We all of us, indeed, feel a deep joy at the circumstances, and I need not say that her happiness is complete. We must only now pray for your entire recovery; and it is indeed a pleasure to think that we can be of any service to your father.’

Gilbert winced.

‘I will endeavor to be a good husband to her,’ he said.

‘Oh, I am sure, quite sure, that her future will be happy with you. She is a good girl, Gilbert. I have brought her up at my side, and feel that she will make your home what it ought to be. Of course, I need not say that since I have seen you together I have observed you, and have seen that you are thoroughly worthy of taking your place in our family.’

The good creature smiled a circular smile, half composed of arching mouth, half of creased chin. She was not conscious of any condescension or patronage.

‘She will have no need to complain of her position in our family,’ said Gilbert haughtily.

Mrs. Tegart-Hoare suspected him of saying something of which she did not quite approve.

‘Well, I am afraid you are tired now, so I will leave you,’ she remarked. She paused to bestow her first kiss on his forehead before she went.

He listened to her going downstairs, and sat in nervous fear lest she should return, but she remained there for half an hour talking to Mr. Strode.

Gilbert took his head in both hands. ‘If one could only be mad, one would be happy. I think I have been mad—I remember having been happy.’

After all, he thought, it was amusing; it was a sort of goods transaction. Ella was handed over to him or he to her, without his having ever spoken to her on the subject; but he would have to do it, and he dreaded the passing of days that brought it nearer. Still, he looked forward to the marriage, feverishly, anxiously, he wished it over; then he would write to Theresa and tell her to announce it everywhere, and Agatha would be safe. That, at the bottom of his heart, was his motive; on the top of his heart, new comfort for his father, who was getting frailer, much frailer. He should not suffer any more—not, any way, from want. He depended upon Gilbert almost entirely now; he came to his son confidingly, patted his knee, and pointed out how he would do this and that when they were better off. ‘Eh, Gilbert?’ he said gladly. ‘It’s most fortunate, isn’t it?’

One day Ella came to visit Gilbert, soon after her mother had been. As she entered the room

it seemed to him that she walked even more heavily than formerly, that she carried about with her an atmosphere of busy unrest. Her brown eyes looked straight at him, frankly, lovingly, with a simple, open regard that had something grand in it. But he looked at her mouth, and wished her teeth were not so big; he was sure they had grown since he last saw them.

‘I am so sorry you have been ill. I have been dreadfully anxious. But I thought you were better? Ought you to be out of bed?’

‘Why, yes, one gets tired of bed sometimes. I am much better, thanks.’ He was more than usually stiff and cold, just because he was trying to be very nice, for he had made up his mind to be as nice to her as possible. Since he was going to marry her he owed her that.

‘You don’t look comfortable,’ she went on prosaically, and she began with her instinct of nursing and arranging to settle the cushions with deft enough fingers.

‘Thank you, you are always doing things for other people, Ella, don’t you tire of it?’

‘No,—not when it’s for you.’

‘Really?’

‘Of course ——’

He paused; the dreaded moment had come, he was going to bind himself deliberately, irrevocably; a last tumult of regrets rushed through him, and vague ideas of still saving himself hovered in his mind. Perhaps she would say no; the humors of the situation in this event occurred

to him for a moment, and then he took her hand to attract her attention.

‘Then if I asked you to be my wife and do things for me always, you would say——’ he murmured hoarsely.

‘Yes, Gilbert.’

In spite of himself, the quiet dignity of her answer moved him to a little admiration of her. Then, he thought, how lucky it was that she was plain and prosaic, and gave the answer with no tremor of sentiment in her voice.

Of course she had looked forward to this as the inevitable consequence of her long and close acquaintance with him, no doubts had ever troubled her. He was grave and upright, a fine man as she knew him, whom she respected and admired, and it made no difference to her that he was wan and aged by illness: it simply gave her the additional joy of looking after him. To be his wife was to her a proud and possible ambition; nothing in her world was impossible, for the impossible was not worth thinking about.

‘You will miss a lot of things you have in your present life,’ he said with some qualms. ‘Are you quite sure, Ella?’

‘Sure about what?’

‘About the change, and you will have—a broken-up fellow to look after——’

Ella laughed heartily. ‘What an idea,’ she said; ‘why Edwin is often ill!’

‘And remember—we may as well go all over it now—I don’t agree with your mother on some

subjects. I shall never interfere with you or her, but I shall expect her to treat me with the same respect.'

'You mean that you are n't religious, Gilbert?'

'Not, at least, in her way.'

'You are n't an *Atheist*?' she asked, realizing only this other kind of fanaticism.

'Certainly not,' he went on patiently. 'But I do not go in for prayer-meetings and all that sort of thing, you know, there are other ways. I am afraid it sounds unkind,— and it makes a difference to you, Ella?'

'I know you are different, but perhaps it is because you are so clever. Father always says I am stupid, I have grown up in it, you see, and I never thought particularly about it. Will you want me to change things?'

'No, no, you will do as you have always done, unless anything happens after.'

She thought him a little cold, but that was always his manner, and she did not like emotional people. Perhaps, after all, he was less distant to-day than usual; or perhaps it was because he was ill.

'I wish you looked better, can't I do something for you?' She floundered round him aimlessly.

'I shall be all right in a week or two, and Stanley is very nice. He has given me two months from the day we leave town, at the end of which he will raise me to old Cooke's place.'

'I am sure you won't be strong enough. Do you need to go back to the office at all? Isn't my money enough for us to live on?'

‘No,’ he answered, with a red streak crossing his forehead.

She sat down and admired him.

Then there was a great bustle about going away. Gilbert was asked where he would like to go to, and he indifferently mentioned some places at hazard, but Mrs. Tegart-Hoare unfortunately discovered that each had a serious drawback. She went on sundry expeditions into the country, and returned to pour into the ears of her family the history of each house to let she had visited. Gilbert at first thought it necessary to show an interest in her complicated explanations, but Marmaduke said to him, ‘Don’t worry, just leave her alone. She is quite happy if you grunt at every semi-colon, and nod at the full-stops.’ Marmaduke himself was obliged to accompany her, and on the whole found it more entertaining than his drowsy life at home.

Mrs. Tegart-Hoare was also busy house-hunting in London; it was difficult to find a suitable house that was not too dear; she impressed upon Ella the fact that she was entering into poverty. Furniture must be seen, a note-book of arrangements settled, so that the two ladies were very busy, and Mr. Strode was as happy as the day was long, for they had much need of his opinion. But he frightened Gilbert by returning very tired in the evening, sleeping badly and showing a great fear of the night; he would not go to bed till twelve or one, unless removed by Martha.

Gilbert, by doctor’s orders, was kept out of all

this business, but when he heard by chance that Mrs. Tegart-Hoare was settling on a house for him, he went to see it without delay, decided that it was much too near West Kensington, and refused to take it. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare stared at him in stupefaction.

‘But I think it is the very house for you, so near us too.’

‘Yes,’ murmured the eldest son, foreseeing pleasant evenings to spend there.

But Gilbert proved unwarrantably obstinate, so Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, perceiving that his illness had upset his mental equilibrium, decided to remove him at once to the country, which proved, after all, to be Marmaduke’s own estate. In the meantime, knowing much better than Gilbert, poor dear boy, could possibly do in his present condition, she would take the house and furnish it. But he before the whole family said, ‘I do not wish to disagree, but I do not care for the arrangement of the house at all. Ella has told me of another which seems more suitable, cheaper, and better in every way.’

‘My dear boy, pray don’t worry; I have much more experience than you in the matter: I am perfectly certain that this one will delight you after. It is for your good that I am acting.’

‘I don’t doubt it, but — in fact, I have written to the landlord of the other.’

‘Never mind, I can easily put him off,’ she answered with a beaming amiable smile.

Gilbert sank back in hopeless, aimless anger,

a moisture under his eyes and on his forehead, a tremble round his mouth; Ella had learned to know these signs.

She stood up and knocked over her chair.

‘We don’t care for it, mother, the other one is much better suited to us.’

‘Ella-h?’

‘Gilbert likes it better anyway,’ she said with a touch of dignity. ‘As we are to live in it we ought to choose. I intend to take the other.’

‘But — it’s so far away.’

‘Gilbert wishes it,’ said Ella conclusively, and she remained mistress of the situation.

‘Is it worth troubling about?’ asked Mr. Strode nervously.

‘Distinctly it is,’ murmured Tegart-Hoare with a chuckle. ‘Ella intends to be mistress of her own house like her mother, but she appears to consider her husband to be the master of it, which is extraordinary.’

The marriage was to be hurried on as quickly as possible; Mrs. Tegart-Hoare dreaded the frivolity it entailed, wished it over and her daughter settled down. Mr. Strode was overcome with an odd nervous hurry, and Gilbert felt it a cloud hanging over him and wished it were all finished. The only impediment was his slow recovery; he had not the air proper to a bridegroom, but the interval was unutterably tedious.

His position as Ella’s accepted lover was extremely unpleasant to him; she was always with

him, always with him, and though he tried to enjoy her company, her faults became very flagrant and annoyed him. He told himself that she was a very good woman with many estimable qualities, a better wife than he deserved, oh yes, all that. He only wished that the marriage was over, then it could not be helped; now he still entertained foolish, half-mad ideas of escape which it took him all his time to control.

‘What is the matter with you? try to look more cheerful, one would think you were plunged in the deepest misery instead of the most happy circumstances,’ said his father. ‘I have to keep making excuses for you, — it’s — it’s a great trial to me.’

‘I am sorry, but I suppose one can’t help an unfortunate physiognomy.’

‘No, no, of course not, of course not,’ said Mr. Strode absently. ‘By-the-way I have a letter from Henry here, he wants to see you to-morrow. He won’t see me — the old ass — and declares that gout won’t let him move from his hotel.’

‘What does he want to see me for?’

‘Don’t know, don’t know I’m sure. Money I fancy — eh?’

This ill-omened word fell heavily on Gilbert’s ear, and next day he went to see his uncle very unwillingly.

Henry was as much like a worn-out shaving-brush in appearance as he had ever been. He remarked that Gilbert looked ghoulish, and that his old vagabond of a father fully merited his

reverses. Gilbert coldly interrupted that he was not accustomed to hear his father spoken of in that manner in his presence, and that everything had been satisfactorily arranged. Henry, taking no notice of this, went on to say that his nephew had been a fool not to come to him before, that he could not allow his heir to hold the ignominious position of living on his wife's money, and that he would consequently make an allowance of so much, for the sake of family pride only. His hatred of Mr. Strode could not be restrained for long: he said, 'Well, he has killed his wife and done his best to ruin his son.'

Gilbert answered that he could do without the allowance offered in such a spirit, that he stood in no need of it.

'You will take what I give you, damn you, and you will use that,' chucking down a cheque, 'for going abroad on. You have no say in the matter. I'm not moved by affection, I hate to think that my heir is an unpresentable object. And now you may go.'

So they parted with a mutual regard for each other.

Next day Gilbert endured a journey in a train, and Ella's and Mrs. Tegart-Hoare's attendance upon him. The combined circumstances sent him to bed for some days, and then the amount of nursing he received caused him to get up in self-defence and wander in search of peace. The eldest son was sympathetic. 'There's a place behind the tubs in the conservatory,' he said, 'where

I used when ill — ' he touched his pocket-Bible gently — ' you — er — won't mention it — er? '

' Oh certainly not,' returned Gilbert gratefully, and he betook himself thither.

The county called and on one or two occasions Gilbert was visible, but Mrs. Tegart-Hoare pinned him in a corner and introduced him to such as she approved of. He saw some nice people to whom he was only allowed to say a word or two. Every one, of course, was charmed with Mr. Strode, and Gilbert felt proud of his father as he watched him conversing easily over the tea-cups; his eye dwelt again, with a new pleasure on the charming smile, the jumping white hair and graceful gestures.

The marriage was called ' very simple,' but Gilbert thought it a long and gorgeous ceremony, and the ' very few ' guests seemed to fill the big drawing-rooms. Ella did not look well in white, but he told her that her dress was beautiful, and she was very pleased. She looked stout and robust beside him, and her vivid coloring emphasized his leanness and paleness. No one, not even the county paper, had much effusive praise to bestow upon either of them. Frank was there and ate most of the almond icing.

' A marriage is an awfully swagger show and all that,' he said to Gilbert with his mouth full, ' when it 's not your own. They look the next-door thing to convicts, the ones that are being married, I mean.'

It was done, and Gilbert felt a dull sense of

relief. As soon as possible, he disappeared behind the tubs, very glad that the honeymoon, which had been projected for appearance's sake, was rendered impossible by the weather. Ella did not seem to have any superstitious feeling about honeymoons, nor any great love of touring. 'Gilbert can't go out in this weather,' she said with something that sounded like a sigh of relief. So he went to the conservatory, and found the weather depressing. He was not a man who could make sunshine out of what life offered him, he must have his own particular kind of sunshine or none at all. That was how he saw Ella's worst points, and all Agatha's very beautiful virtues. He sat a while behind the tubs in solitude.

And the butterfly sailed away, out of reach over the hill. Adieu, adieu! petit papillon bleu! The next day, in the study, business was discussed, several papers signed and so on. Mr. Strode was very stupid about it, he did not comprehend what was said to him, he seemed very deaf and said, 'What! what!' continually. He fidgeted and lost his temper, and when all was finished, he jumped up with alacrity. 'Now, Gilbert—' when he hesitated and fell back in his chair unconscious. This happened at a most unfortunate time, for Gilbert, knowing that some such catastrophe must happen soon, had been in a hurry to get back to his own house in town before it occurred, and now —

The doctor shook his head. 'I doubt' — he began. 'He *shall* live, I say it,' shouted Gilbert,

and Ella gazed at her husband in alarm. She put her hand on his, 'We must trust in God,' she said simply.

'We must get another nurse,' he answered with unconscious brutality.

Mrs. Tegart-Hoare somehow, in spite of her efforts to raise a proper affection, found herself kept at arm's length by the new member of her family, and she began to suspect that he would be difficult to manage. She was astonished at the energy he suddenly developed, was a little annoyed by it, and told him soothingly that he really bothered too much, one could only pray.

'He is my father. Do you not understand?' and then he went on to say, politely, that she did not need to stay at Farniston on his father's account, since she had so much business awaiting her in London. She looked at him and obeyed. She had been saying that her duties in town could wait until dear Mr. Strode was better. She had, however, conveyed to the household that this was an unusual sacrifice on her part. So Gilbert begged her to sacrifice herself no more, and since she was not the chief mistress of the situation, she complied with his request.

'You must write every day, and tell me everything,' she said as she kissed those of her family she was leaving behind. Gilbert bore the caress with frigid gravity, fully determined that it should be the last. Then he showed himself master of the house to such a degree that every one did his bidding without demur, and Mr. Strode, with the

aid of the best nursing, the closest attendance, and his own elasticity of constitution, partially recovered. His remembrance of things, particularly of recent events, was very vague; but he smiled whenever he saw Gilbert.

‘Yes, yes, this is my son,’ he murmured, patting the hand extended to him, and Gilbert came away with a bright light shining in his eyes.

As soon as possible they took him up to London, and then they went abroad. He recovered marvellously, the doctors said, and he ruled the household completely as his humors and fads came back to him. Ella regretted it at first; but she fell under the influence of his charm, and stood with great good-humor his sharp attacks of temper, his growing suspicion of her. And she thought it very nice that Gilbert, such a stern, precise man, should be so gentle, so untiringly patient with him.

Ella was a happy person. She loved her husband, all the more because he grew ‘fiky,’ and engendered habits. She even helped him in this, perhaps, by continually favoring his likes and dislikes. She saw little of him when they came home; but her life was full of other things, which generally had some connection with him. Bed-socks, for instance. She only regretted his passive, unbending opposition to her mother, and Mrs. Tegart-Hoare, who had looked forward to ruling and managing this household, came to the conclusion that, after all, it was as well that Gilbert had chosen the house furthest away.

CHAPTER VII

THERESA lingered in town until she heard that Gilbert was better. Then she started with her brother for the cottage they had by the seaside. It was a nice place, standing alone with a plantation of trees round it, on the edge of a cliff, and it had a little bay to itself. Lester, contrary to his usual habit, was distraught and lonely, and did not seem to find his ordinary pleasure in the sea. It had been his custom to lie on the cliff, the blue sky above him, the blue sea below, enjoying the wide vista of glowing color. Ever since he was a boy he had done that, and when Theresa had asked him what he was doing, he said simply 'It is so blue, isn't it blue?' and he stretched up his hand with an expressive gesture that made the sky of much more import to her than it had ever been before. She saw in it a width, an unutterable depth, a magnificence. . . . When a storm came he went indoors, and watched from the drawing-room windows. The premonitory finger of it swept over the sky in a long streak of black cloud, and others, white, rolled up from the horizon heavily. The sea turned gray, fretted into a myriad wrinkles by an insolent wind. Then each wave tossed up white, and they

rushed against the rocks, great-devouring, relentless beasts, roaring with impotent fury, foaming, lashing, clawing, retreating with a backward suck for a fresh onslaught. All that, Lester pointed out to Theresa from the window. These things had never before ceased to interest him. It was generally new, unknown things that tired him; he clung affectionately to old surroundings, and never wished for any others. Perhaps, having grown accustomed to Agatha's company, to have had her continually his chief object of thought, he missed her, and found his life dull without her. Theresa, whose only business was to attend upon her brother, was infected by his spirit of disquiet, and worried all day long to find occupations for him. He liked gardening, and took a great pride in his roses; but this year his interest flagged, and none of her feints could rouse it. He was also fond of sailing, and often went out in his boat, Theresa, of course, always with him. It was, in fact, an ideal life they had led there hitherto in perfect companionship and freedom; but Theresa felt that she had carried the unrestful atmosphere of town away with her this time, and she feared, from Lester's behavior, that he was pondering over some new idea, and would suddenly insist upon returning to his big studio, and plunging into work.

She was thinking about it one morning as she raked and weeded, presenting an odd figure in a big hat, an apron of canvas, and large earthy gloves. A ball of twine protruded from one

pocket, three or four packets of seeds from another, and she wore a pair of sabots she had bought in France. She had not the youth and beauty that looks well in such attire.

She expended her anxiety upon James, a willing old servant, and said to herself as she tied up sweet peas, 'I really think James is getting too old. Old servants are a great mistake.'

It was one of those phrases that people cannot live without. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare's was, 'I must change the drawing-room curtains.'

'Theresa!' Lester called over the laurel hedge, and she went quickly, accompanied by two puppies who snapped at her heels at every step.

'Dogs!' she said, aimlessly kicking from side to side as she walked, 'I can't have it. There's a glove,' and she threw it away, watching them run after it, with soft loose legs that flounced about with the uncertain grace of the skirt-dancer.

Lester met her, with his hands full of roses, smiling with pleasure at the color of them.

'This,' he said, taking a little bud and caressing it with a dainty finger, 'what a wonderful thing it is, is n't it? Look at the warmth of the life in it; this deep orange, the yellow, the green tints, just unfurling and unfurling till it reaches its full-blown beauty. How does it know how to grow, to swell, to unroll its leaves, to pack them up so tightly?'

He gazed at it in a pleasant current of thought.

Theresa laid the others in a pocket.

‘This yellow rose,’ Lester went on dreamily, ‘would suit her, it would go with her pale hair——’

‘Who?’ queried Theresa sharply.

‘Agatha, don’t you think so?’

‘Yes, perhaps it would.’

He talked about Agatha so simply and openly, that it never occurred to his sister to suspect that he regarded her in any way differently to other women, whose beauty had struck him. Perhaps he did not.

He remained lost in thought, twisting the bud about in his fingers, and she heard him murmur ‘Genevra.’

She had hoped that this idea was forgotten; since he had torn his picture to pieces he had never mentioned it to her, and she felt a shiver run through her as the ill-omened subject reclaimed his attention.

‘We had better put these roses in water,’ she said sadly, and turned away.

‘Wait, let me put this here.’ He fastened the bud, smiling the while, on the front of her coarse apron. To him she was neither plain nor absurd, he never criticised her, never connected her in any way with his art; she was his well-loved sister, who, ever since he could remember, had been at his side, to whom he turned for all his wants, who sheltered him from the storms of life.

So she turned to go into the house, in her big hat and sabots, the little bud fastened to her apron.

‘Dogs!’ she suddenly shouted, and ran as fast

as her heelless shoes would permit, to her two puppies who were busy digging up the bed she had just made. Perceiving her, they sat down side by side, and regarded her with big sentimental eyes. A torn plant still dangled from the solemn mouth of one.

‘Who did that?’

The puppies regarded the hole in innocent surprise, then suddenly eight unsteady legs and two waving tails whirled round her in a loose-jointed ecstasy of delight, and in half a moment the lawn was strewn with chewed roses, tangled twine and seeds. Theresa and the two puppies were at last brought to a standstill by a connection of ravelled string, and gazed helplessly round for aid in the midst of the destruction.

‘Untie me, James,’ said Theresa.

The old man approached cautiously, muttering that the beasts would be the killing of them all some day. They went away with him; they often walked with James, finding that his slow gait facilitated the playing of hide-and-seek between his legs. This was particularly enjoyable when he carried such a thing as a tea-tray. He said that he was not fond of them, he called them ‘damned, mischievous, destructive brutes’ to the gardener, and polished their collars every Friday with the silver.

Theresa loved her puppies because they furnished her with continual occupation of a kind that did not allow time for morbid reflections, and they returned her love with open devotion

that was very satisfying. They ran to meet her whenever she appeared, or searched for her when she did not come, walloped round her feet with an emotional and dental affection she could have dispensed with, gazed up into her eyes with sentiment, broad smiles upon their faces. They destroyed the garden, tore things in the house, were always audible, and were apt to appear in the drawing-room, curveting and mincing, displaying with pride ghastly scraps that the butcher of the village had thrown away. Theresa gave them castor-oil every Saturday. They growled and quarrelled, they made all the noise in the village fights, seated at a safe distance, and went to sleep over the hearth-brush, one at each end, a tuft of colored hair sprouting from each mouth.

‘They’re so much nicer than children,’ Theresa told Mrs. Yorke, ‘and so much less trouble.’

‘My dear!’ murmured this lady, who theoretically loved children and adored babies, although the only remark she had been heard to address to the former was, ‘Now, darling, run away and play.’

When the puppies slept, the house rested. ‘Sh! don’t wake the dogs,’ one said then, and even Theresa enjoyed these moments of quiet. Lester, also, was very fond of them, and sat on the lawn playing with them, laughing as he seldom laughed at other things, and with the high-bred discrimination of their kind they were never unbecomingly mischievous in his presence.

Theresa and Lester led a happy life in this quiet

house, in the midst of its gardens and simple pleasures. Afterwards Theresa wondered why fate could not leave even this nook alone, why she must come even here with her meddling fingers, darkening the sun that had shone there peacefully so many years.

At that moment, with no such thought in her mind, she jerked to and fro busily, and having a necessity for talking, soliloquized aloud, or carried on one-sided conversations with her brother at varying distances; or else in the shade of the veranda she read to him, while he sketched idly, and the puppies gnawed quietly at a stolen shoe. Or else again, Theresa in several aprons put on unbecomingly before and behind, with surroundings of soap, towels and scrubbing-brush, was endeavoring with the aid of the gardener to wash one of these animals in a big tub. On these occasions James was careful to shut all the doors and windows of the house, for the beast invariably escaped, a shining, soapy, slippery thing that made straight indoors for refuge.

‘Theresa!’ Lester cried once at a critical moment.

‘Yes, do wait. I’m washing Adolphus.’

‘Theresa!’ called the persistent voice after a short interval. She went at once and he kept her some time over little matters of no great importance.

‘I hear sounds in the distance, I must go,’ she said at last, and a sticky, soapy animal gambolled to meet her, well coated over with ashes from the dust-heap, a favorite play-ground.

But the joys of these things faded when she saw the well-known cloud settle on her brother's face again. She did her best to dispel it, and suggested a little cruise to distract his thoughts, so in the afternoon they went down to the beach, and punted out to the lugger in which they sailed leisurely about the coast. Theresa would not allow him to go alone, partly because they both entertained an exaggerated idea of his dependence upon her, and partly because he was apt to dream occasionally and forget to pay attention to his sails. She did not even care for him to scramble about the rocks in the bay; out at the point the water was very deep, the shore shelved and there were quicksands. He had been accustomed to sailing all his life, but it was too hard work for him now to go alone.

It was delightful out in the boat that day; a little breeze bore them gently along; the coast was yellow in the glowing sun; the sky was blue, the sea was blue, the trees very green, the sand white, and this vivid blaze of color formed a landscape scarcely English.

Theresa talked, but Lester gave no answer, he appeared to be asleep. 'You know,' she went on, 'it is no use puzzling about it, you could paint the picture better without Agatha, you are wasting time over her, she is incapable of the expressions you want, she has n't got it in her. Why do you go on wasting time over her?'

'I will make her,' he murmured drowsily. Then he woke up and talked about the sea, and

all those little things that make conversation pleasant. In the evening they returned, Theresa heavy of heart, Lester happy and content.

Next morning, in turning over the letters at breakfast, she appeared to James to be in a bad humor, and her comments upon her correspondence were not kind.

‘Gilbert — at last. I hope he does n’t write to Agatha, he has no one with sense to look after him, now that I am out of the way. Decidedly my lot in life is to act super and chambermaid in every one else’s dramas. Mrs. Yorke, dear me!’

She proceeded to each one in turn, soliloquizing as was her habit while she opened the envelopes.

‘Dogs!’ she cried, as she unfolded Gilbert’s letter, ‘be quiet, and leave the hearth-brush alone, I can’t hear myself speak.’

The letter was short and crisp enough.

‘DEAR THERESA, — I am all right again, and cannot thank you enough for all your kindness, but I shall hope to do so in person when we meet again. I have been extremely busy during the last month or two, and that must excuse my silence. I am married and my father has been dangerously ill — (Theresa read this twice, and then went on mechanically, without comment). — I will not hide from you, that the chief object was money, — (here a whole sentence was scratched out, and though she investigated it inquisitively for some time, she could make nothing out). — You may express your sentiments as much as you like by letter, should you find my news astonish-

ing, but do not mention the subject when I see you. And, Theresa, Ella loves me more than I deserve. . . . My father is very happy; he likes the society of the doctor, and luckily I can afford these luxuries for him now. Our new address is below. We are, however, going away, and will not be there till autumn.'

That was about all it contained, and his writing was stiff, as though he had gripped his pen very hard.

Theresa jumped up from the table, absently shoved the puppies away from the hearth-brush, and sat down to write an answer at once. The puppies returned to the brush.

The first page of her letter bristled with an anger that warmed Gilbert to an affectionate smile when he read it, but at the end a round watery blot attracted his attention, and he put the sheet away carefully in his pocket.

The puppies sat solemnly side by side, their fascinated eyes fixed on Theresa's white handkerchief. They waited in silence till she dropped it, then seized upon it with a squirm of joy and galloped out into the garden, mouthing it. Having torn it to pieces, they returned proudly and attracted her attention to the pieces. She gave them a slap and a lump of sugar.

In Mrs. Yorke's letter there was nothing but a little gossip. She heard that Gilbert had married a Tegart-Hoare, quite a nice girl, though not in her set. He was really very wise to marry into a family with money. She rambled on for three

pages, and at last came to the purpose of her writing. The climate in the north did not agree with Agatha, who was certainly not well, which was a nuisance since she herself was also seedy. She was enchanted with Theresa's description of her home and wished to know whether there were any nice little houses to let there, if so, she would be delighted to settle near friends for the summer. Was there any society?

'No,' growled Theresa. 'Certainly none that you will care for.' At this moment Lester entered the room, and idly looked over her shoulder to see what she was reading.

'Mrs. Yorke wants to come here.'

'To us? That is very nice.'

'You would like them to come?'

'Oh yes—very much.'

'Here, as guests?'

'Do you not mean that?'

'If you would like it.'

'Yes, I would like it.'

'Very well,' and with a sigh she wrote to invite them.

An effusive answer came a day or two later, followed after another interval by Mrs. Yorke's own charming person.

'What a delightful place! So secluded and peaceful!'

'I only hope you won't find it dull, there is nothing to do,' said Theresa with scant grace.

'We are absolutely idle all day long.'

'Yet, you have as usual the air of being ex-

tremely busy,' Mrs. Yorke regarded her hostess's apron and trowel. 'One is never dull with you,' she added.

She continued to be amused during the two months she spent there. She sat generally in front of the house, a great ornament to the garden, and Lester was aware that the scenery was improved by her; or else she went out in the boat, only after a few cautious questions as to whether they should not take a man. Theresa pottered about as usual, somewhat annoyed to find that her soliloquies were always answered, and that she was obliged to keep her dogs out of the house. Agatha was silent and gentle, and Theresa treated her as a nonentity, and, like her mother, was rather glad she kept so much to her room.

'You have come?' Lester said to her.

She answered, 'Yes.'

'I have not seen you for a long time.'

'No, such a long time — to me — but you have not noticed my absence, you have other things to do.'

'Oh, I have missed you.'

'Missed me,' she murmured. He looked at her as she stood before him in the green shadow of the trees, delicate lights touching her pale hair, her white face.

'Yes,' he whispered in delight. 'I have missed you.' He drew her down to him and kissed her, and seemed to find the same pleasure in gazing at her as at a flower.

‘Very beautiful,’ he cried, his sparkling eyes looking through her, beyond her. He held her hands, he touched her face with caressing fingers and kissed her again.

‘You are glad to be with me?’

‘Yes, oh yes.’

‘With me, with *me*,’ he urged.

‘But you know I love you.’

He held her hands tightly, drinking in the music of her words, watching the green shadows flicker on her face.

‘I love you, I love you,’ that was all she had to say, and she said it again and again in response to his asking eyes.

Agatha was so quietly happy pursuing her way and the course of her passion so calmly, without evidence of excitement, that Theresa saw nothing, nor yet suspected anything. Lester was the last person to raise her suspicions, and having taken it into her head that Agatha was capable only of commonplace talk and action she would have continued in her opinion with very flagrant evidences to the contrary under her nose. She heard Lester tell Agatha of his meditated next picture, she heard her reply that she would sit as long as he liked, and she passed by without hearing any more of the conversation, or troubling about it. She was glad that Lester had another companion: it was a change for him; her company must often tire him, she thought, and she noticed that he was better and brighter since the arrival of the Yorkes.

It hurt her a little. 'You are an idiot, Theresa, you are growing selfish, a monomaniac, and remember you are only the chambermaid,' she said to herself, and went out and cuddled her dogs.

Mrs. Yorke, having nothing else to do, awoke to the fact that Agatha was really very much with Lester; she began to wonder, being a conventional person, whether that was right, considering his peculiarities. She thought about it at ease, a little surprised, a little put-out that the idea had not occurred to her before. She personally disliked Lester very much when he was not there, and she was a little frightened of him in his presence because he took no notice of her. But she really could not undertake to speak to Agatha and make a fuss, Agatha sometimes displayed a temper that was quite upsetting. It would, in fact, be a relief to have her married, to a genius too. So, she said, 'I will just let it be, it could n't be better.'

She remembered the many sittings, and determined to speak to Theresa on the subject, since Lester was so very irresponsible.

'Theresa, I believe you invited us down here on purpose.'

'What purpose?'

'Why, you intriguer, for Lester and Agatha to be together.'

'He enjoys her company.'

'Well, if you put it that way, it's the same thing.'

'Same what?' asked Theresa sharply, mystified.

‘My dear, don’t bite me. It’s impossible that you have n’t remarked it. Why, ever since I have been here it has been as plain to me as daylight. They are always together, everywhere. It’s horrid, you know, when one grows old to see others doing it, but of course I am pleased for Agatha’s sake. I never in the least suspected such an ambitious turn of things for her.’

‘I don’t understand,’ said Theresa, following a puppy with a corner of her eye.

‘I believe your attention is riveted on that horrid dog!’ Mrs. Yorke paused, astonished at Theresa’s obtuseness. Besides, the subject was always one that one skirted round about, hinted delicately, a perfumed lace handkerchief of a thing which one dangled with daintiness. Cupid is a dressed person; has wings, and a quiver, and a strap to fasten it on by — oh, very much dressed. It is impossible to denude him.

‘Must I be plain? Dear me! Well, don’t you see that they are practically what you might call — engaged?’

‘Engaged?’ repeated Theresa blankly.

‘Think of all those sittings and things. And now, I spoke to Agatha last night. She did not contradict me. And just think what people would say, after all this, if they were n’t!’

‘Engaged!’ said Theresa again, and suddenly dropping her trowel marched off without another word.

‘It seems to me that every one is a maniac nowadays. I suppose clever people are pre-

dominating. I am afraid that I prefer amusing people. Agatha was quite mad last night, had nothing to say for herself; and now Theresa, as usual, is cracked in her behavior. It's lucky that I looked into it after all, but it's really a great nuisance. And it is getting very cold.' Mrs. Yorke went indoors.

Theresa went straight off to look for Agatha, and, having found her, stood stock-still before her without uttering a word. When she spoke it was softly, very kindly. She had not much to say.

'Agatha.'

'Yes.'

'Are you engaged to Lester?'

Agatha stared at her in amazement.

'Are you engaged to my brother, because if so, I ought to know, you know?'

'I don't know,' said Agatha dreamily.

'What!'

'I love him.'

'Ah, then it's true!'

'Yes, oh yes,' said Agatha with sudden eagerness, and, taking Theresa's hand in hers, she added, 'And he loves me.'

Theresa said nothing. She looked at Agatha, and had a glimmering now of what Lester admired in her. She was distressed, and gently disengaged herself from the retaining hand. She seemed about to speak, but she hesitated, and finally sighed, without any remark.

'I hope it's all right,' she murmured as she went away, carrying with her a picture of Agatha's

face. 'No, it is all wrong!' Then she went out for a long walk with her dogs. She was away a long time, and when she came back and heard that Lester had been asking for her, the same irresolution came on her face. He welcomed her eagerly, and wanted to know why she had gone away without telling him, and for so long.

'No, no,' she said to herself; 'not yet, not now.' After this the atmosphere of the household became perturbed. Theresa was abstracted, moody, and sad, and Mrs. Yorke felt awkward.

So in the end of September it grew cold, the leaves began to fall, and Mrs. Yorke found it melancholy. Theresa said she liked autumn in the country better than any other season of the year. The red leaves and purple tinge of the baring trees seemed to her an exquisite combination, and she liked the still decay of things.

'Ghoul!' replied Mrs. Yorke, with a twirl of her umbrella. 'You won't care for these things when you grow older. It reminds you of death, and that all things end,' she shuddered.

Lester was beginning to suffer from the damp weather and to weary of his idleness, so they determined to return to town.

Although the puppies had attained a certain state of sobriety, it was impossible that both should accompany their mistress, and with many pangs she resolved to part with one, and spent much time in discussing to whom she could trust him. At last she decided to send him to Gilbert, and forthwith despatched him, without asking this

gentleman whether he wanted a dog or not. She wrote a long letter, which seemed to take a great deal of thought. She said that the dog's name was Gustavus Adolphus, and that he answered to Dauphin, Dolphin, Japhet. He ate Spratt's puppy biscuits, pear-peelings, bread and mustard, gooseberries, strawberries, nuts and sweets, shoes, pencils, hearth-brushes, and — important item — cinders. Then she paused. She remembered the day when Gilbert had helped her to clean the studio; now he was married, and Agatha had passed out of his life. But she knew Gilbert. 'Feelings, full of feelings,' she snapped to herself, and wrote a long letter about Gustavus Adolphus. At the end she put, 'We are coming back to town in a week's time. Agatha's engagement to Lester will be given out.'

'Suppose Gilbert does n't want the dog? He may find it rather expensive; new house, too,' said Mrs. Yorke dubiously, watching the many preparations made for Adolphus's convenient travelling.

'Impossible!'

'But his wife?'

'Wife!' said Theresa, with a nut-cracker snap of her jaws.

'I am afraid she is rather a nonentity, and I should say that he is a very unpleasant husband.'

'His appearance is awe-inspiring, luckily. A hideous enough Guy Fawkes to keep people from seeing the straw he is stuffed with.'

Mrs. Yorke, in fear of travelling with the

remaining puppy, hurried away at once, and Theresa did not seek to retain her.

Agatha told Lester that she would see him again very soon; she took two hours to the saying of this, and she left him with a glow on her cheeks and a perfectly placid brow.

So Mrs. Yorke and Agatha returned, and then Theresa and her brother, and no sooner had they arrived than Agatha was always about again, it seemed, at least, to Theresa that she was always there. Lester filled odd moments by working up the Genevra again; it progressed very slowly and sometimes, but seldom, he would sketch Agatha roughly in charcoal, generally rubbing it out as soon as it was done. His silent patience was well known to his sister; he was apparently no longer interested in this picture, for he was engaged on others, one or two pressing commissions, yet she knew that even if it took him ten years he would still do it, and she prayed that he might not find another who suited him better than Agatha. At times, when she thought over it, she wondered whether it was not all a concoction of somebody's, if she could not yet snatch Lester back to herself, and carry him away to the other end of the world. People came and congratulated, and she listened dully, answering prosaically that it 'would greatly depend on Lester's health, and other circumstances; she could fix no date, in spring probably, May or June.' Then she laughed to herself, should she tell them that it was all a farce? Lester loved no one but her, and had she

not given up her whole life to him? It was absurd to connect anything so human as love of woman with him, he, who had none of the ordinary passions of men. Such a simple, simple little man, — yet his simplicity had not been respected; Mrs. Yorke and her daughter had, of course, been scheming; Theresa, if she had only not been so blind, could have stopped it all long ago. Surely Agatha was only art to him? Theresa asked herself questions in infinite sadness, for, beyond a certain point, she knew her brother no better than any one else. She watched Agatha, but her happy placid exterior was impenetrable; how should she be warned that he was not as other men?

‘If Eve had n’t been made of Adam’s rib, she would n’t be attached to him, dear dog, and would n’t disturb you and me,’ she was remarking to Marcus, when a visitor came just when she was not wanted, and prattled on subjects that Theresa felt no interest in just then.

CHAPTER VIII

GILBERT was very busy, he made a point of being so. He helped Ella and her Anglican aunts, but in such a manner as to show them that he was not one of them and did not intend to become so. Mrs. Tegart-Hoare was not often in the house of her son-in-law, she preferred that Ella should go to her. But still entertaining thoughts of Gilbert's conversion, she sometimes went on Saturdays, when she knew he would be there. She pervaded the house the moment she was inside the door: why did Gilbert hang all his coats in the hall? the new housemaid left dust on the stairs; what price did Ella pay for her bacon? Her voice faded away in the distance as she went upstairs to Ella's bed-room, and servants furtively huddled things into cupboards. She visited Mr. Strode, read to him, excited him, angered Gilbert, who felt that he had been gently scraped with a grater beyond endurance, kissed Ella, smiled supremely at the pegs where Gilbert's coats had hung when she arrived, and left texts for Ella to paint.

Immediately after one of these visits, Gilbert had taken his wife to see Theresa, but the visit had been a failure. Some of Theresa's most

peculiar friends happened to be there, and astonished Ella, who had been brought up in the very good and solid society which remains in the midst of London, provincial. She was shocked; and was distressed to note that her husband appeared to find himself at home amongst these people, that his manner was indeed far less stiff than she had seen it before.

‘No, Gilbert,’ she said when they came away, ‘Miss Schelless is your friend, but ——’

Somehow she seemed to him at that moment more stupid, more *gauche* than ever.

‘I will not force you to know them,’ he answered. ‘But I have known Theresa all my life, and of course I intend ——’

‘Oh, of course,’ assented Ella, but a tone in her voice told him she agreed only with reluctance, and they continued their journey in silent displeasure with each other.

As he took out his latch-key at the corner of the street, a little brougham bowled up to the door, and to his surprise, his father got out slowly, and stood laughing and nodding his head to some one inside. Then he made a sweeping bow and the brougham went away.

‘Well, Gilbert,’ he cried, with a radiant smile, waving his stick, ‘guess who that was?’

‘Some one I know?’ asked his son, giving his arm to help him up the steps.

‘You did know, any way. Well now, Mrs. Yorke, I met her round the corner. Most astonishing how people turn up, isn’t it, after years

of separation? As charming and as youthful as ever, wonderful woman!’

Gilbert tried to answer with a smile, but Yorke, Yorke, always that name — it seemed to dog him persistently, and he wanted so to forget it.

He was not nice at dinner that evening, there was nothing to find fault with and this annoyed him; and he was unreasonably provoked that his father found such a pleasure in his discovery of Mrs. Yorkè. He looked back, with opened eyes at the days of Campagne Salève, and at the mischief the thoughtless little woman — of course it was her fault entirely — had been nigh to making. It pained him that when she came again, she was so welcomed. But then, true, if it amused his father — Ella unconsciously blundered by remarking that Mrs. Yorke had been to call the other day, and that she was very nice, and well-dressed. ‘It was affecting to see how delighted she was to meet your father. Are you cross, dear?’ she added, after gazing at him for a moment.

‘No,’ he replied, with every sign of this state of mind upon his face.

After dinner it entered into his head to wind up all the clocks, keeping his wife running for this and that incessantly. She had asked him a week before to put together some models she was making for a bazaar, and suddenly he announced, that since he had no particular business to-night, he would do them now. She and the servants were accustomed to these attacks of busy tidi-

ness, and Ella liked them for they brought him closer to her; on other nights he had so often 'something to do' in the study. Still, she suspected that they occurred when he was put-out, for he generally looked pained and ill, smoked much and answered her coldly when she spoke to him. To-night, with a smelling pot of glue on the fire, newspapers spread on the hearthrug, he turned up his sleeves and investigated the pieces with an absent and gloomy expression.

'You are so neat-handed that I thought you had better do it, but don't trouble if you are tired. Why don't you rest sometimes, you are always working, is it wise? — oh, I think it's the Eiffel Tower, or some such thing. I thought it might be raffled — do take care of the carpet, had n't you better do it in the dining-room? Oh dear, I hear that dog!'

She bounced up with her usual energy, and ran away calling Gustavus Adolphus. She liked the dog, and romped with him; but she wished that he were not allowed so much in the house, and by sundry complainings had tried to get him expelled to the kitchen; but Gilbert, suspecting her of disliking him after the fashion of her mother, who sat upon and squashed all things she did not approve of, coldly refused. His wife therefore spent the first month after the beast's arrival in guarding her household properties.

Her abrupt departure caused a disturbance in his arrangements on the hearthrug; but he made

no remark. He lifted a weary eyebrow, and felt lonely, for his father's hand trembled too much now for him to occupy himself with such neat work as he had done formerly.

Ella returned, breathing hard with her exercise, and plumped down beside him, fingering the pieces and talking. Gilbert confined himself to 'Pass me this, Take hold of that for a moment, Don't shake,' and so on.

'Would n't your father like to do this?'

'I am afraid his hand shakes too much.'

'What a pity, because I fear he is lonely up there all day long. He does not like me, and he does not care to have the Bible or any other book read to him; but I suppose I read badly. I read so little, and I get so sleepy at night.'

This last phrase penetrated to Gilbert's wandering thoughts, and he suddenly became aware that, without complaint, she led a very lonely life, and passed whole evenings by herself. He glanced up; yes, there she was, watching him affectionately, and he, beast, had been as nasty as he could be all day. But then, he thought angrily, how could she expect him to be nice? Had he not suffered, suffered, . . . did she not continually fret and worry him, was not his whole life a failure, and she the tangible evidence of it?

She caught his eye as he looked up and smiled in response. He blushed with shame, and hastened to make up for his negligence. Brute that he was, he had no business to inflict his private grievances upon her.

‘The edifice grows,’ he remarked pleasantly.

‘It’s quite nice work, isn’t it?’

‘Lay the foundation-stone, Ella, to bring it good luck.’

She did so, laughing the while.

Then, when they separated for the night, he kissed her affectionately.

‘My good wife,’ he murmured, for sometimes, when he awoke to her innocent, single-hearted love of him, her tolerance of his caprices, he admired her again as on the day that she had said, ‘Yes, Gilbert.’

But when he looked forward to a long perspective of years to be spent in this way, a coldness settled on him, and he knew that long before the way was half traversed, something would happen, or he would go mad. No, he could not go on, and on. . . . He felt a hot hatred of all around him, a vague desire of vengeance, . . . yes, he wanted to revenge himself on something or some one, — on whom? He was almost afraid to trust himself in Ella’s company. Perhaps he was mad now, — ah no. . . . A big desire to see Agatha grew in him; he had not seen her for so long. He had kept himself away so scrupulously. That was why. He thought of her so often that all his thoughts seemed to run into that one groove. Or was it Agatha that he dreamt of, or only all the beautiful things that, in his life, he had only touched with his finger-tips, had only seen far away? Other people attained all that they wished, and he — Suddenly he stretched out

a clutching hand, and cried, 'So I will!' Then he dropped his head, and told himself that that was impossible.

Out, across a summer sky, a blue butterfly had flown away peacefully over a hill. Adieu! Adieu! p'tit papillon bleu!

And yet, time passed, weeks perhaps, or months, and he dawdled on. He had given up going to Theresa, and heard nothing of what passed. He was scarcely even missed by Theresa, who was too much occupied in her own thoughts to notice his absence. No one missed him. Agatha and Lester went their way in sublime happiness. Mrs. Yorke was pleasantly engaged in planning and replanning the marriage.

But Theresa, not knowing this, was working towards the conclusion that the marriage should never take place. She would say to people, 'Oh, it is broken off,' and then one would go away and shrug a shoulder, and murmur, 'It is only a genius.'

Many things had brought her to this conclusion.

She sat outside in the drawing-room, quite alone, and she could hear Lester's voice in the studio; he was in a passion again. This could not go on any longer; she would have to speak to Agatha, to open her eyes, to tell her point-blank that he only loved her as something to paint; but she had let the time slip by, and every moment she was alone with Agatha, she talked studiously of other things. For many weeks she had heard Lester's uplifted voice in the studio, and knew that the Genevra was failing again.

Agatha had sat to him, and sat to him, at intervals during the winter. The picture was nearly finished, and it did not please him.

He received Agatha to-day with a troubled face, he ran to meet her, and she saw the strange expression again that had been growing on his face for many weeks.

‘You have not come for a long time. I have been waiting for you.’

‘I was not well.’

‘But I wanted you.’

He watched impatiently while she took off her hat and cloak quickly. He drew her by one arm to the platform, and forced her into position with unconscious roughness.

‘Why do you not look as I wish you to? Do you not *see* what I want?’

His gaze frightened her, and she tried to soothe him by the caresses that had never failed yet to quiet him. He did not respond, did not even listen. The subtle influence that she had been gaining over him, which she had felt, and of which she had enjoyed the exercise, was gone, or was of no avail when the passion that brooded at the back of his eye, shot forth with an ominous sparkle.

‘If I only saw it, if I could only see it,’ he muttered to himself, and turned to the picture.

Then he began to paint.

Agatha thought that she remained in the strained position in which he put her for hours; once she asked for a rest; but he did not hear

her. He was seeking, seeking for the expression, the one expression that receded obstinately from his eager hand. He went on desperately, trying to clutch at what he could not catch hold of. Maddened with a sense of failure, he went on, with more concentration than he had ever shown before. He would do it, he must, and he turned again to study her. But as he looked, she wavered, once or twice she swayed, and then fell heavily upon the floor, and lay there without a movement. He ran to her, knelt beside her, called to her; but she did not answer.

‘Agatha! Agatha!’ He touched her, he kissed her, he knew that by the saying of certain things he could awaken a look in her eyes that he loved; but she baffled him now. She neither answered nor stirred. This made him angry, and he tried rougher measures, and then in his helplessness he rose to go for Theresa; but on his way to the door, he passed the easel where he was working, paused to note the effect of the picture. It reclaimed his attention, and he set to work again, forgetting the woman who lay there prone, no longer of any use to him, no more in his thoughts.

Presently he drew back to regard the effect of his work again; then he flung away his brush, the palette clattered to the floor and he stamped upon it. A great anger at the thing, the paltry baffling thing seized him; his inability to conquer it, he, who had never known what it was to be over-mastered, drove him mad with fury, with

thwarted will. He ran about the room beside himself, silent, for the words stuttered behind his clenched teeth. He came against the platform and saw Agatha lying there still and his eyes gleamed as he sprang towards her, all his passions concentrated in this glance. He sat beside her for a moment inactive, gleaming, smiling, trembling, and then his notice attracted by her shiny hair, he plunged his hands into it, seized her by it and shook her, — he shook her.

‘You! It is you!’ he hissed. ‘*You!* You will not obey me — you can, you shall — I will make you, — oh — I will make you — I — I — do you hear — you shall. You! — ah!’ He flung himself upon her panting, shaking her still, to make her answer.

‘I am never mistaken, — why do you not answer me? I will do it — it is so easy — you keep me from it. You ——’

He clawed her with fingers already growing weak. He waited a moment but she did not answer him and the gleam grew colder in his eyes.

‘I will make you. I — I will make you!’ he whispered lower and lower. His little hands crept round her neck, the sibilant whispers dropped from him more slowly, his own fair, fluffy hair touched hers as he bent over her, and his little hands crept round her neck. . . .

Suddenly her eyelids quivered, lifted, and she looked up at him, consciousness gathering and bringing with it the look he loved. He dropped

back, watching the smile spread over her face; he was astonished, he trembled still, and the perspiration glistened on his forehead. No, this was not the creature who had lain there a moment since, who had baffled him, opposed him; this was she who caused him so much pleasure.

Agatha realized that she had fainted, and — he was there, he had restored her. . . . He had left his work, he, who could not be drawn from it even by Theresa — he had come to her aid, was leaning over her now.

‘Lester! I have fainted, have I interrupted you? Forgive me, I could not help it, but do not be troubled on my account, do not look so troubled. See, I am all right, do not be worried. Let us go.’

He felt her embrace again, and the beautiful face looked up at him as he loved; yet a remembrance of his hands round her neck, and all that he felt when he put them there lingered in his confused thoughts, and he watched her distrustfully.

‘I do not want you,’ he murmured, ‘to sit any more.’

She gazed at him in astonishment, then she noted his fatigue and trembling hand, and wondered at the sensitiveness of his nature. She whispered soothingly all the caressing words she knew to calm him, but his troubled air, his perplexed frown, his doubting eyes frightened her, and she felt a momentary uneasiness.

‘Lester!’ she cried, ‘what is it? Will you not tell me? What is the matter with you?’

He continued to regard her in silence, watching her frightened face in fascination.

‘Yes,’ he murmured at last. ‘It is she, and she is beautiful.’ The gratified smile came to his lips as he listened to her, he was very tired and the sound of her voice was pleasant in his ears. He urged her on, he held her hand, and a sense of peace and well-being stole over him.

The door behind the curtains opened and Theresa came in. For a moment she looked at them, and for a second time she understood the beauty of Agatha, and she realized that art sometimes is only the shadow of reality, and that even out of pictures, women looked like this.

She banged the door.

Agatha turned, and Theresa’s appearance brought her back to the ordinary life that existed for her outside the studio. She wondered dreamily how it came to have invaded here.

‘Agatha,’ said Theresa, ‘I think he is ill to-day and you have been here a long time.’

‘Yes, I am afraid he is very tired; I will go.’ She turned to Lester and repeated to him that she would have to go now. He put his arm round her to detain her. ‘No, no,’ he said, kissing her.

Theresa turned her back and clasped her bony hands together. ‘It is evident that I must remain sane,’ she said to herself, trying to fill her ears with her own nonsense. ‘Yes, I am sane; it is the only bathos of life, and makes everything

ridiculous. Theresa is ridiculous, and inadequate language only gives her a big *Damn*, and that is not appropriate.'

She turned briskly and found that Agatha was just shutting the door.

'Lester!'

He did not answer.

'Lester, listen, dear. Do you love this woman?'

Seeing that it was Theresa, he smiled as he had always smiled to her, and she cried suddenly:

'Lester, you will never leave me, you love your sister, you will not go away from her. Oh, you will not leave me alone — now?'

'What? Theresa, what is the matter with you? — leave you?'

She knew quite well that he could not do without her: she read it in his eyes.

'No, no, I was talking nonsense, as usual.' She was silent for some time, thinking, perhaps, that if it had not been for her blindness all this might never have happened and as it was ——

'But do you love Agatha, Lester?'

She watched his vague eyes travel round the room. 'Yes,' he said at last.

'But do you realize what that means? You know you must marry her.'

Lester was becoming more and more dreamy and did not seem to hear.

'Lester, you must marry her, you know that?'

A painful, dreary business this that Theresa had to do.

He turned his face towards her slowly.

‘Yes,—very well. I am so tired,’ he answered vaguely, almost sleepily.

‘Yes, but attend, dear, do you hear what I say?’

‘Yes, yes,’ and his eyes closed heavily.

Theresa felt her loneliness and friendlessness very much; the burden that rested on her shoulders was great and she had no one to help her. How could she say to Agatha, ‘Go away while there is yet time, he does not love you’? How could she tell her that he would tire of her, that he could not live without her, Theresa, and that moreover he grew restless, excited, ill, in the other’s company? ‘You will not be happy together, and *you* will not want me.’ Agatha would not understand. She would simply be angry. And then if Theresa allowed the marriage to take place, did she not know very well what the consequences would be? No, at all costs, it could not be allowed; her first consideration was of course her brother, his happiness, his comfort, his health. What a fool she had been; why had she not seen it long ago, before it had gone so far that Mrs. Yorke had spoken to her about it?

She would go to Mrs. Yorke now, and see if she could not find some sense in this careless, unthinking little mother. Theresa went in dread, for Mrs. Yorke had every right to be angry at the matter to be explained to her: but, perhaps, flippant, lazy, she would not mind, or she would understand.

She was, however, as usual, inaccessible. The drawing-room was full, for Theresa had happened

to arrive on her 'Day,' and several ladies of Mrs. Yorke's varied acquaintance were gossiping mildly and eating sandwiches. Beside Mrs. Yorke on the sofa sat an old gentleman, a very beautiful old gentleman, and they seemed to Theresa as perfectly matched as a pair of china figures. His silver ringlets jumped with each turning of his head; when he smiled he displayed excellent white teeth, all the little movements of his shaking hands were very graceful, and a startling youthfulness sat on his face that made her think that his frailty was due to illness, not age, most certainly not sorrow. Then, as he turned his profile to her, with a wicked smile apropos of some witticism he was about to utter, she noticed a strong resemblance to Gilbert as he used to be, and it flashed upon her that this was Mr. Strode. She looked at him again, he, who had such a footstool of a son, who was such a happy man, ah, yes, such a very happy man. She wondered how he came to be here and alone, for she had understood that he was entirely confined to the house and dependent upon his son.

She went forward to shake hands, and when at last he understood who she was, he was charmed to meet her again, and apologized for his deafness. She asked about Gilbert and received only a very vague reply.

'I believe they are rather religious, the Tegart-Hoares?' asked Mrs. Yorke.

'Oh dear me, yes, extremely so! Had I not better introduce you to them?'

‘Wicked! you have not forgotten how to be rude yet. But it astonishes me that you should belong to their family now.’

‘They are amusing. Tegart-Hoare is very nice. A very good thing for me, — for me.’

He beamingly discussed the good points of the family, laughing at them the while, but he forgot their names, and looked blank when Mrs. Yorke recalled reminiscences, and said, ‘Ah? Yes?’ continually. She watched his flushed, nervous face with anxiety, and almost wished he had not come; he was so very old, and ill, and yes, a little foolish.

‘It is just as well that you are in the hands of the Tegart-Hoares,’ she said lightly. ‘It will give you a chance of saving your soul.’

‘I lost it long ago,’ he answered as flippantly, ‘I think you had something to do in the losing of it, eh?’

‘That sounds dreadful. You know I never did anything wicked in my life.’

‘Really? no, no, perhaps not,’ he laughed to himself. So they flirted with each other, until Mr. Strode began to show signs of fatigue. He looked about restlessly and put out a feeble hand, and murmured, ‘Gilbert.’ Then he rose in a sudden hurry and said that he must go, searched for his hat and gloves with a great deal of aimless fuss, and Mrs. Yorke, considerably frightened, drove him home. She talked to him on the way, and told him, laughing, that he was really getting old, or rather frail, and was it safe for him to go out so

much? He should stay at home. Then she dropped him at the corner of the street, and went on her way shopping. Gilbert saw him coming, excited, flushed, and bewildered, and went to meet him.

‘Yes, it is Gilbert,’ said Mr. Strode, taking his arm with a sigh of relief. ‘Make haste and open the door, boy, don’t keep me out in the open air, I think I have caught cold.’

So Theresa had found Mrs. Yorke otherwise engaged, as usual, and was obliged to go away without having said anything. She had heard one of the sandwich-eating persons say, ‘Quite delightful for Agatha, is n’t it? Her mother has told me for certain that the marriage will take place in June.’

‘Nothing is decided,’ Theresa had bounced out. ‘My brother’s health is too unsettled.’

This was followed by a gentle, ruminative, cud-chewing silence, but when she turned to go away she heard some one say:

‘Health! You know that means his mind; he really is — I have heard it said that he is — very eccentric.’

Theresa went away with these words ringing in her ears, and the worst of it was that they were true.

Next time Agatha came, as usual, to see Lester, she was met by Theresa, and it seemed to her that the small woman was as indomitable as the guarding dragon in fairy-tales.

‘No,’ Theresa began, ‘you cannot see him —’ and there her jaws shut with a click. She was

going to have had a long interview with Agatha, to have appealed to her womanly sense, to have shown her, — hideous task, — her brother as he really was. ‘Don’t you see,’ she was going to have cried, ‘he is very gentle, very lovable, but he is a genius, and, — he is odder than he used to be? He does not love you, he does not want to marry you, it is not right that he should marry you.’ She was going to have told all these brutal truths to Agatha, but as soon as she saw the tall, fair, dreamy woman, she realized the futility of it, and she said, ‘You cannot see him.’ And Agatha slowly withdrew.

‘No,’ Theresa said to herself, ‘she suspects me, she would not believe me.’

With a quick brightening of her face, she suddenly jumped up and went away to put on her hat. She was going to Gilbert; he was her only friend, her only intimate friend, for, as often happens, in the midst of a large circle she stood alone. With her usual promptitude of action, she went to him the moment she thought of him, quite forgetting, in her hurry, the relations she had supposed to exist between him and Agatha before he married.

She arrived there and was shown into the drawing-room, and her observant eye mechanically took in all its details.

‘Wife predominates here evidently. I wonder whether she painted the mantel-piece — not bad. There is not a vestige of Gilbert here — poor Gilbert.’

A door was opened somewhere and a dry, precise voice called, 'Ella! Who dusted my room this morning?'

There was a heavy scuffling of feet and a breathless person answered, 'Mary, I suppose. Why?'

'Did I not leave particular orders that nothing on the writing-table was to be touched? Now I miss two important letters. You must either get rid of that girl or see that she obeys.'

'But, Gilbert, she is a very good servant. I will tell her, but are you sure they are n't on the floor?'

'Certainly not. I've looked, of course.'

A little more conversation in the same tone ensued, then the door was shut again and a bell was rung sharply. A moment after, Ella, red and flustered, swung into the drawing-room and apologized for keeping the visitor waiting.

'Oh dear!' she broke off, 'there's the cat,' and she hastily caught it up, adding, 'My husband does not care for it to be in here,' and disappeared again with the animal in her arms.

Theresa looked and listened in wonder; she almost doubted whether it was really Gilbert's house she had entered. When Ella returned, she talked for five minutes on ordinary topics, and decided that she liked Ella. Ella thought Theresa was much nicer than when she had last seen her.

'I may as well say that I have come to see Gilbert,' announced Theresa abruptly, after a pause.

‘Oh!’ said Ella hesitatingly, ‘he is at home. He is obliged to take his holidays now, unfortunately, although I think he needs them. He works so hard, you know, and he is far from well just now. Mr. Strode is very weak and frail. I think that partly upsets him. The doctor comes every day, and he told me that he thought he would be the better for a change.’

Theresa did not pay much attention to the colloquial mixture of pronouns, and Ella stopped, having come to the end of her news.

‘I will go and look for him,’ she said awkwardly.

‘Oh, no,’ said Theresa. ‘Don’t trouble. I’ll go,’ and she darted away without further ceremony. She knocked at the door she had heard open a while ago.

‘Well?’ growled Gilbert.

‘It’s me. Make haste and open the door.’

Ella listened to this in open-mouthed astonishment. She herself would not have dared to address him thus in his present humor. Gilbert opened it hastily, and Theresa went in.

‘Theresa!’ he exclaimed a little huskily, extending his hand in welcome. ‘How pleased I am to see you.’

She was conscious of a moisture round her eyes, for, from what she had heard of him, she had not expected this effusive welcome, the real joy that lit up his livid face. He put her into the biggest chair, and stirred the fire and looked at her expectantly.

She felt a sudden reluctance to speaking about

Agatha to him, and he did not look like a man in a position to give comforting advice. Her conclusion that that episode had been one of those things that pass in a man's life began to waver; perhaps, after all —

‘How many times do you go to church on Sundays now?’ she asked irrelevantly.

He understood from this, and her face, that she was greatly annoyed and troubled about something. What? he wondered nervously.

‘What is the matter? Has anything happened?’

‘Yes,’ said Theresa sadly.

‘Tell me, what is it?’

‘Don’t look so anxious, it has nothing to do with you, only with me.’

‘Only with you?’

‘No, no, Gilbert! I want you to help me.’

Then all of a sudden she disappeared behind her handkerchief. Gilbert sat before her, his knees drawn together, in the awkward position of a man alone with a woman crying.

‘I am keeping you waiting,’ she said presently.

‘I will wait as long as ever you like,’ he answered gently, but his face belied him. He was terribly anxious.

‘I know, that is why I came. But I came to talk business. It is you, Gilbert, who upset me. I am never upset by anything.’

‘Did you say you wanted me to help you? You generally help yourself better.’

‘I will tell you all about it. I don’t know

what to do. I have been so blind. I was secure in his simplicity — ' She told him the whole situation, and gradually became too absorbed in her own view of the case, her own distress, to notice his silent attention. He sat motionless in his chair, and turned his face from the light.

' Her mother is no use, and I cannot do it. She suspects me; she would not believe me. There is no one, only I thought that you, who know her so much better —— '

' I? Do you know what you are saying? ' he shouted, leaping from his chair.

For the first time in her life Theresa was unsympathetic, selfish, self-absorbed. Her one thought was fear for her brother, and she would leave no stone unturned where he was concerned. She was no longer looking at Gilbert, and it was simply with surprise that she said:

' Even you will not be sensible. Will you not help me? Don't you realize what my brother is to me? '

He sat down again, pushing his chair a little further into his dark corner. ' Go on, ' he said.

' But, Gilbert, she will listen of you better than to any one. She spoke more to you, and you seemed to understand her better. You know you were a sort of brother to her. '

' Sort of brother! ' He laughed. Had Theresa quite forgotten, or was she choosing to forget for her own purposes?

' Yes, ' he said, seeing that she paused, ' a sort of brother. '

‘When she was a little girl she always went to you.’

‘That is a long time ago.’

‘But a hint or two — just a word.’ Theresa walked about the room. ‘Surely you are not going to treat me like a stranger now, to keep me outside that wall of silence too, Gilbert? Have you no feeling for her, then, that you will not even move a little finger?’

‘Hush, stop! I — er — I am thinking.’ After a moment he added prosily, ‘Why do you not marry them and look after both of them?’

‘Impossible! it would lead to all sorts of catastrophes. I have just been explaining that to you. Where are your wits? You are not helping me much.’

He thought again in silence. Theresa paused before him and peered into his dark corner.

‘Gilbert?’

‘But,’ he began desperately, ‘I never see her. I have not been to the house for yea — months. I could not make an ostensible call and deliver a lecture.’ He suddenly laughed; it was, like everything else, so ridiculous.

‘Of course not, but I can arrange it. I am going to take Lester down to Nodes. Then I will invite her, then you, and then I will take Lester abroad.’ Theresa talked very fast, and the more she thought of it the more she blamed herself, the more she set her heart on her little plan.

‘It will be very easily managed then. Oh, how

I blame myself for having been so blind! It is all my fault; but perhaps it is n't too late. Gilbert, you will do it, won't you, Gilbert?'

'Very well,' he said; 'I will do it.'

'I am sorry it should fall on your shoulders. I would have done it myself if I could.'

'Oh, it does not matter.'

Having arranged this, Theresa returned to comparative equanimity, and awoke to his somewhat odd behavior.

'Gilbert, I will not press you, — if you have any serious objection,' she hesitated.

'No, oh no, I assure you.'

'What is the matter, are you going to despatch me with that? Was your dinner indigestible last night or what?'

He rose to see her to the door, and taking her hand held it in his for some time, looking down at her the while.

'Gilbert, you trouble me dreadfully. You always do what I tell you, but I feel sure this time that it is something you really do not wish to do. Don't make me feel that I am forcing you, — to anything that hurts you.'

'No,' he said quickly, dropping her hand. 'Nothing of the kind.'

She went away feeling that she had not succeeded; another person's opinion generally helped her to make up her mind her own way, and she came away with the sensation of having beaten herself without effect against a stone wall; no, not quite a stone wall, but she felt that Gilbert

had become inaccessible even to her. He was the only person to whom she could turn, and he had listened so reluctantly, so coldly, — but no, his manner had not been precisely cold, he seemed, if anything, overcome with inward emotion. She gave it up, only she went home with a nameless oppression hanging over her, and she said to herself, ‘I know that it will not come right. Something will happen, I feel it in the air, — like thunder, yes, distinctly thunder.’

Gilbert sat down again after Theresa left him; she did not know how cruel she had been, but he had undertaken to do it. He would go to Agatha and he would say to her, ‘You must not love this man, you cannot marry him, he is mad, — or any way he will become so, — he will make you unhappy, and it cannot be allowed.’ Ha, ha! he, — *he* would say that to her. And could he trust himself? He had not seen her for so long, he had banished every thought of her from his mind, and she was not an unnaturally beautiful creature of dreams to him, was she? He looked forward to a nice long honorable life at the office, with his wife at his side, did he not? oh yes, he was a cold, prim person, who could be trusted with this paternal duty, and he must help poor Theresa; it is very nice to have confidence reposed in one, particularly by such a managing general as Theresa.

He could trust himself, his emotions never gained the upper hand of him — one — two — Agatha — no, never. Her actual presence would

not awaken or rouse this strange turmoil that sent the blood throbbing in the veins in his temples! Did he love her, or was it only all his bitterness, his disgust with life, his perverted energies, his broken, miserable, hated life?

‘Gilbert! Gilbert!’ cried Ella, knocking at the door. He flung it open.

‘Dinner. The gong has gone three times. I am sorry we are so late, but Mrs. Weir Brighton was here and kept me talking. Her daughter is going out to the Zenana Mission, I am sure she is very brave.’

After a while Ella went on. ‘Do take more soup, Gilbert, it is one of Shaw’s invention, and I think it is very good for you.’

‘It is very good, my dear,’ he answered pleasantly. ‘You are the best housekeeper any one could have, Ella, and you have the art of looking as if no responsibility rested on your shoulders.’

She smiled well pleased, and never thought of telling him the amount of anxious consideration his habits and idiosyncrasies cost her. She never had pointed them out to him, or only in such a way that he mistook it for feminine grumbling.

‘Oh, by-the-bye, the doctor said he would come again to-night, he said your father was not so well to-day. And Mr. Strode was calling for you this afternoon, and when I went to tell him you were busy, he was quite upset. I wish he had not taken such a dislike to me.’

‘Yes, it is unfortunate, but you should have

sent a message by Martha. 'You know he is not to be irritated.'

Both relapsed into silence, and the moment the meal was over Gilbert hurried upstairs, and Ella sat down alone in the drawing-room. She felt lonely, for it had not been Gilbert's habit lately to leave her in the evening, he seemed to seek her company, and the restless eagerness would die from his eyes when he sat beside her. 'Read to me, Ella,' he would say, and he had gradually educated her to read and appreciate books that formerly had been Hebrew to her. The simple pieces that she only played for her own satisfaction, he listened to with evident pleasure, and would have none of her sonatas; and her placid flow of commonplace conversation sent him to sleep, for which she was glad. True, he came down in the morning something hot, in a hurry and a state of frigid fuss that upset the household. But all men are like that, you know, especially when they are going to the office.

Gilbert went upstairs quickly. This nightly visit was a painful business, more especially since his father had come home that day, chilled and angry. A terrible dread clutched at his heart every time that he turned the handle of the door. It followed him always, it told him that his father was growing frailer, much frailer every day. He paused now in the passage to compose his features and to smile before he entered. He looked round the room and thought that surely nothing was wanting here, nothing absent that would help to

retain this precious life and preserve it. Surely this would be left him; it was not possible that this should be taken from him.

His father was sitting as usual in his big chair by the fire amusing himself with chessmen on a board, for his eyesight no longer permitted him to read or write.

‘How are you to-night?’ said Gilbert, crossing the room.

‘All right, all right, my boy. You are late, you leave me very much alone, why didn’t you come sooner?’

‘I will come as early as you like to-morrow. I think the doctor is coming again to-night.’

‘Who, who? Speak more distinctly.’

‘The doctor, — you know, — the nice fellow who brought the chessmen. You like him, don’t you?’

‘Yes, very nice man, but he thinks I’m ill. Now I am as well as possible.’ He shook his curls and laughed cunningly.

‘Never mind, he has plenty to talk about, and these little mistakes don’t matter.’

‘No. — What’s-her-name! Tuts, forget people’s name now. Martha, what’s-her-name?’

‘Ella,’ said Martha quickly.

‘Yes, of course, E-Ella was here this afternoon. I wish you would keep her away, why do you let her come?’

‘It shall not happen again; but she cannot do you any harm, I am always there.’

Mr. Strode fingered a pawn absently, and

glanced about him evidently trying to catch some thought that evaded his memory.

‘Ah yes! Clothilde, — no,’ he shook his head testily; this name invariably angered him.

‘Mrs. Yorke, Mrs. Yorke ——’

‘Yes?’ said Gilbert anxiously. She had come to visit his father once since he had been confined entirely to the house. She had stayed five minutes, and had descended in a flurry, had admired the drawing-room and had made several useful suggestions to Ella.

‘She was here — she was extremely rude, — she said I was old and ill, — she laughed — and something about being bothered by decrepit old — what was it! — she used to admire me, she is not old, I am not old —’ his face flushed and he leant forward in his chair with the vague troubled look in his eyes that smote the heart of his son.

Gilbert took his hand. ‘Look,’ he said. ‘Don’t think about her, she is not worth it; if she does n’t admire you, well it does n’t matter, she is silly. I will not let her come here again. You have me, you know.’

The wandering fingers closed over his hand. ‘Yes,’ murmured his father, ‘you are here.’

There was a moment’s silence, Gilbert did not move, and Martha coughed the awful cough that comes on old people sometimes.

‘What is the king doing over here — a problem?’

Mr. Strode laughed merrily, and began to show his son how the king came there. He had been teaching Martha to play and she was so stupid,

then she had read him a detective story and he placed the men to show her how it worked.

‘ See,’ he said with interest. ‘ This was the fellow that committed the murder, that bishop over there the one that stole the ring — no, was it? Martha, read the story again. Now read distinctly, I can’t hear you, read distinctly, I tell you!’

Martha approached the book to the lamp and peered at it through her worn old eyes, eyes worn in the service of this most charming master; Mr. Strode, with a happy smile, placed the chessmen as the story unfolded, and Gilbert knelt beside him, very interested also, giving furtive knocks to the obstinate pawns that his father’s shaking fingers could not move properly.

In the midst of this, Martha remembered that it was time for Mr. Strode’s medicine, and Gilbert rose to put it out.

‘ Don’t go away, come here, — the things are all falling.’

‘ Yes, — just one moment.’

‘ Will you come here? You have knocked them all over. I wish you would do as I tell you.’

‘ No, see, I am here,’ said Gilbert, putting the glass down before him.

‘ What’s that? I don’t want it, take it away. You have upset them, and all my work is undone. Careless, thoughtless, selfish, — always were.’

‘ I will pick them up, I know where they were. Let us get this glass out of the way first; it is only a mouthful.’

‘Do you takè me for a child, damn you? You, and the doctor — and her — you’re in a conspiracy against me, you want to poison me, I know you do. Take it away at once, at once.’

‘Father!’

‘Don’t shout at me, I am not stone deaf yet either — take the thing away at once; you want to poison me, I know you do, you tried the other day when I was ill. You want to keep me shut up, you want to make people believe I’m — I’m — Leave go! Martha! Martha! make him leave go.’

Gilbert was obliged to retreat, while Martha soothed her patient, but he could not make up his mind to go away; he would wait till the mood was past, till the smile was back again, it would come very soon. But he could not be long with his father now without this happening; always, always his visits ended in his going away, sad, outcast, while Martha calmed her enraged master. Did he really distrust his son? It seemed so like it that Gilbert could not take it philosophically and say to himself, ‘He does not mean it, he does not know what he is saying.’ And at other times his father showed such an open love of him; the wandering fingers closed over his hand, ‘Yes, you are here.’

This love was all he had, all, all.

‘You had better go away, Mr. Gilbert.’

‘No, I will wait here and see.’

‘You must go just now, Mr. Gilbert.’

‘I shall stay in this corner.’

‘Houts!’ said Martha.

‘Keep an eye on him,’ went on Mr. Strode. ‘He has evil intentions, I’ve seen it, over and over again. They keep me shut up, he makes people say nasty things to me, he forgets who I am, and that I’ve done everything for him, he was always untrustworthy.’

‘No, no,—listen,—I am your son, you know. I am your son. Look at me, you trust me, we were doing the chess a little while ago, don’t you remember? Yes, you know me,—say that you know me,—Gilbert, *Gilbert*, you love Gilbert! He always does everything for you.’

The smile, that particular smile did not come back. ‘Take him away!’ shrieked his father, recoiling from him, and turning helplessly to Martha. ‘He is trying to catch hold of me, save me! You will repent treating your poor old father like this some day, sir, when I am gone. It is you who made me ill, I won’t have it, do you hear? Put him out—lock the door, I won’t have him in here again.’

Gilbert went. He went down to his study and walked about there through an endless night. He told himself that his father did not know what he said; yes, but that did not alter it. A little while ago these tempests had been brief; they had passed away, and his father had looked at him, looked at him so confidently,—they gave him something to live for, to think of always, to care for, those eyes. Ah! they were very much to him, these loving, following, watching eyes. ‘Yes,’ his father would say, ‘I have you, my boy.’

And now they were very seldom there, more often they were doubting, mistrusting, and afraid; oh, that was it, they were afraid, and they only grew the more frightened the more he tried to soothe and explain. 'It is I!' he cried to them and they made no response, they were frightened — of him.

The night was very dark. Just as well perhaps that the night was dark; one does not want the eye of light to penetrate this darkness, no! — no!

In the cold grayness of early morning Gilbert crept upstairs; at the hour when some things die and others sleep, and the shadow of another world lies coldly on the face of things, when no shadow is black, or no light white, and all is gray. . . .

He paused outside his father's door; probably he slept, or he might be awake, he was sometimes at this hour but — he turned the handle softly and went in, longing for a look from the eyes that loved him.

Gilbert stood at the end of the bed; no, his father was asleep, and Gilbert looked at him.

Mr. Strobe lay with his face to the light, this beautiful face with its white hair about it, the happy pleased smile on its lips. No anger, no mistrust, but only this happy, happy smile. As Gilbert looked, there came back to him very vividly the radiant father who lay in the sunshine at Campagne Salève long ago; it seemed to his fancy, his very kindly fancy, that he of the golden beard, the god-like beauty lay there; he heard the ringing laugh again, and the light shone on the

bright hair of the great, grand, adored father. Ah! ah! cher petit père adoré! Yes, it seemed to Gilbert, that after all, his father had not changed much.

He looked at the face again, and his eyes widened, and he stretched forth a timid feeling hand.

‘Father!’

He fell across the bed with a big cry.

And Mr. Strode lay peacefully with his face turned to the light, and on his lips his most radiant smile.

This was at the hour when the shadow of another world lies coldly on the face of things, and all is gray. . . .

CHAPTER IX

THERESA went to meet Gilbert at the station. He had written her a short letter thanking her for the flowers she had sent, and giving her the date of his departure and the train by which he would arrive. She thought of writing to him, and then concluded that she would not deluge him with correspondence; only she hoped that he had forgotten Agatha, and would not remember the part she had asked him to play. Perhaps she could do it better herself; she would take an afternoon, and in a gentle conversation she would open Agatha's eyes, what could be simpler? But, on the contrary, she found that it grew more difficult, for Lester continued to seek Agatha's society, he wanted her always beside him, to sing to him, and follow him when he idled in the garden, or on a warmer day, to go out with him in the boat. Yet also, as ever, he turned to Theresa for all his wants. 'Theresa! Theresa!' was heard through the house as often as before.

Mrs. Yorke was there, ill, completely upset, and she wondered if they could not put the marriage off for a month or two. 'That he should have gone and died now,' she murmured crossly.

As Theresa stood, waiting for the train on the empty platform, something forlorn about the sleepy little station struck her. She remembered the many times she and Lester had come and gone, and she idly wondered what would have happened before they left again.

The train drew up, one door only opened, and a dog jumped out. Marcus Aurelius approached with inquisitive nose advanced, but he and Adolphus belonged to different families now, and growled a little to remind each other that they had people under their charge. Gilbert followed his dog, and then Ella came with a bundle of wraps and went away at once to look after the luggage.

'Ah, you have come to meet us, that is very kind of you. How delightful the air is here after London. And the train was crammed unfortunately,' Gilbert began somewhat absently. He looked tired, his raised eyebrows, his eyes particularly looked tired, and being an unusually pale complexioned man, the red on his cheeks did not become him.

When Ella came up, Theresa admired her; she was big, perhaps, but she had a commanding presence that carried off her bigness, and she was less stout than she used to be; she had lost her vivid color, and there was an expression on her face which was not all teeth.

'How do you do? — Yes the luggage is all right. I think you had better get in, the air is cold after that hot compartment.'

She packed her husband and the bundle into

the carriage, saying to Theresa, that the long legs of the one and the stick-handles of the other required a certain amount of manœuvring. Gilbert seemed to have changed since Theresa heard him say, 'Who dusted my room this morning?'

Gilbert sat forward and watched the country unfurl on either side of him; little green leaves were bursting forth from silver sheaths on all the trees, round fat purple hedges were beaded with red-nosed buds, and all the brown earth was green-shadowed with the tiny blades that pushed busily up into the sunshine. Gulls from the sea hovered over the fields, and the sun lay low, casting long shadows of trees across the road. The air was full of the chatter of birds; rooks cawed, tits twittered, and the sparrows quarrelled. Oh, everything was so young, growing, green, and all the world was gay. . . .

He leant back in his corner, and took off his glasses.

'I am afraid you are tired. We shall soon be there now. There's the sea.'

'Oh no, only the sun is a little bright on this white road,' and he did not wish to look at the blue, dancing sea.

No one was in the drawing-room when they arrived, for Mrs. Yorke declared that she could not possibly face Gilbert.

'Death, so close to one, upsets me dreadfully. I am quite shaken. And hardly a month ago he was talking away in my drawing-room, and perhaps I was n't quite kind — well, I was n't think-

ing. People with recent losses are always horrid;' and so the minute she heard the carriage wheels she retired to her own room, to wait, any way till the ice was broken. 'Yes, I am old, I am old,' she cried to herself and looked in the glass. 'Any way I must put on that pale gray thing to-night. It is a toning color.'

Ella had not disliked Theresa the first time she saw her, and now she thought her a nice person, particularly, too, as there were no people in green plush garments of odd manufacture about her.

'You know,' Theresa said to her, 'Gilbert is quite at home here, and I hope you will be so also. He needs you to look after him, and you must do that just as if you were at home. No one stands on ceremony here.'

Ella found this to be true. At first she was perplexed, but when she saw that they all did as they liked, came and went or stayed, according to their inclinations, she found the freedom very enjoyable. The drawing-room, all the rooms were homely, and the furniture, worn to the degree of comfort attained by old boots and shoes, was mended and patched and faded and reposeful. It was particularly inviting on the day that they arrived: the sun shone in at the three drawing-room windows that looked over the sea, a group of deep, dozing chairs were gathered round the fire, and a little tea-table stood ready there. It was, to town people, 'the country,' peaceful, simple, beautiful; where one lies under trees and dreams and is so happy — oh, so very happy, and

where the tragedy of life is the crumpling of a rose petal.

‘How nice it is here!’ said Ella, while Theresa poured out tea.

‘Yes, it is growing old with us, and fits round our bumps and projections,’ but Theresa looked about sadly as she spoke; the place was old, worn-out, yes, she felt it, worn-out: trouble had entered into it, and the charm was gone. The sun shone in at the windows and made obvious the patches.

Gilbert sat in one of the deepest chairs trembling at every sound in the house, fearing that Agatha would come into the room at any moment. Of course she would come into the room, as she had come years and years ago, wasn’t it, into the studio; she would swish past and look at another — how she would look at another! He felt a dream-like sensation stealing over him, and he watched Ella with vague eyes; she was receding into the background, into the unheeded surroundings, whence she had emerged last year, was it? — and the image that was reality to him grew larger, and brighter. It was the last thing left him, this image, and even to that he had no right — yes, yes, the image was his, all his, perhaps it was no longer quite Agatha — or it would be wholly Agatha, only when she was there. . . .

Let us jewel the eyes of our idol.

No; he shook himself and opened his eyes, he was dreaming — nonsense, as usual, and he became conscious of a murmur of conversation.

‘Don’t make a noise, you will waken him.’

‘I!’ he said, ‘I am not asleep,’ and then he knew very well that Agatha was there, appearing, as he had often seen her before, with the failing light, the grayness of dusk about her; fair, mysterious, and very remote. She came towards him, and sat down beside him, after having been introduced to Ella.

‘I have heard all about it,’ she said gently, ‘Theresa told me.’ Then, after a moment’s pause, she went on to say that she had not seen him for such a long time, and that she had missed him. She was very sorry that he looked so ill, but the air here would surely do him good; ‘Lester,’ she said happily and simply, ‘improved noticeably in a week, did he not, Theresa?’

‘Yes,’ Ella and Gilbert answered simultaneously, ‘the air was delightful.’

‘It is nearly dinner-time,’ said Theresa, after a pause, beginning to be anxious about her brother’s absence. ‘Play us one of those old-fashioned airs your mother taught you, Agatha.’

Agatha began an air that was well-known to two of her listeners; long ago, Mrs. Yorke had played it at the Campagne Salève, and the sound of it had come through the open door to the children in the garden. ‘Listen! that is the flowers crying because they have to go to bed. Look, the daisy has curled up all its eyelashes,’ Gilbert had said, dreamily lying, as usual, on the overhanging bank of the Arne.

The tune agitated Gilbert now; it thrilled

through him, it played upon every fibre, it recalled to him every emotion, every feeling of joy or sorrow that this woman had caused him. The notes mocked him, they jeered, they were cruel, they were vicious. 'Here we are again,' they said with a hideous laugh in them. 'A little changed, eh! Oh, we are not done with you — we will excite you, work upon you, tear you to pieces. We will remind you of your father, he is not here now, where is he? Nothing is here — for you — only us, listen well, and feel our cutting pain, this is the last time you will hear us. Ohé! — what mischief we are doing! we will tear you to pieces, we will madden you, poor unfortunate, who were foolish enough to come under our spell! Listen, listen, it is the last time you will hear us — the last — time,' sang the concluding chords.

Gilbert rose abruptly from his chair, and left the room. He went out, out into the garden, and felt the cool evening air about him, and heard it whisper among the leaves. Down below was a wide expanse of shimmering sea; subtle, silent, peaceful water, hiding the danger of the quick-sands under a gentle face.

'Dear little tune,' Gilbert whispered to himself, 'that sings to me "a last time." Is there a last time? It goes on and on, always on, but — a last time — yes, I will make it a last time.'

'Gilbert!'

He turned. His wife had followed him, and she said that it was too cold to stay out. He loved her well; she was always the same, and her

presence was soothing. He turned to her for almost everything, and she was always ready to do whatever he asked, with a calmness that made all things seem easy and natural. She no longer irritated him either by an uncomprehending stare.

‘The sea is lovely to-night,’ he said, taking her arm.

‘Yes. I would like to stay out; but I think we should go in. It is so restful, isn’t it?’ By that she meant that she hoped he found it so.

‘Yes,’ he said smiling, ‘very restful. . . . You are not sorry you came now, Ella?’

‘No, — oh no.’

At first neither Ella nor Mrs. Tegart-Hoare had been anxious for Gilbert to go amongst ‘them.’

‘Gilbert wishes to take Ella to that Miss — I don’t remember the name. Of course, one does not wish to cross the dear boy; but I really do not think she is a person I should like Ella to be intimate with.’

‘Well, he can go alone,’ said Marmaduke; but Gilbert had told his wife that he could not go without her; he had become accustomed to her, and had grown dependent upon her lately, and besides, — oh yes, she must go.

‘Don’t interfere with the poor dear fellow now,’ went on Marmaduke. ‘I know Miss Schelless, and I prefer her infinitely to Lady Ulith.’

‘Really! Well, if that is the case.’

‘Yes, I assure you, my dear Emma,’ he added, without qualifying his remark or giving reasons.

So Ella went to her husband, and told him

that her mother permitted them to go, under the circumstances.

‘Permit!’ said Gilbert. ‘Well, well, never mind.’

And Ella found ‘them’ much nicer than she expected. She did not know of course that Theresa was unnaturally silent and sober, and did not understand her when she said one day, ‘I am aging, and my wits are falling out like teeth.’

Mrs. Yorke, delicate, fragile, was a person who moved Ella’s instinct to help, and one generally encountered her carrying some of the shawls and baskets of this indolent lady. Mrs. Yorke was delighted to have some one always there to whom she could chatter. Theresa gardened as assiduously as ever, but with vacant eyes, and without any pleasure, only she found a little amusement in teaching Ella the names of plants and the art of raking.

‘You are one of these people that keep others from going quite mad,’ she said.

Gilbert told Ella that Lester was a great genius, and this astonished her much, he was so gentle, so unobtrusive, so completely in the background.

‘Background!’ repeated Gilbert. She did not know why.

He had sought her out in the garden, looking more than ordinarily tired and flushed, and had dropped down on the ground beside her. She, quite certain that the ground was damp, had pillowed his head upon her skirts.

‘He and Miss Yorke are engaged, aren’t they?’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought so; engaged people are generally invisible, and they are always together.’

‘Always.’

‘But I think she looks very happy.’

‘Yes. Oh, by-the-bye, I must have left my ——’ and he got up and went into the house.

Lester’s study was in a corridor that was shut off from the rest of the house by a baize door, and it was there that he spent most of his time. Gilbert was passing down the passage, when he heard voices and paused. It was Lester, not in the study, but in Theresa’s little piggery next door to it.

‘I will make her!’ he was not speaking loud, but his voice was very distinct, and the sound of it bound Gilbert to the spot.

‘She has defied me — she has done it before — she, it is she who prevents me — she has done it always — always, and I will make her obey me,’ and then it sank to a hissing whisper.

‘Lester, dear, she is asleep. Wait till she wakes.’

‘No, — she is doing it on purpose, — she has done it before, — leave go, — I *must* make her, — leave go.’

Gilbert drew nearer, and saw through the door Lester, struggling to free himself from Theresa’s grasp, his eyes glistening with anger — perhaps it was anger. On the sofa Agatha lay asleep.

‘Leave go,’ Lester whispered, his eyes fixed upon Agatha. ‘Why do you hold me? Why do you not help me? Theresa, help me,’ and with a sudden jerk he freed his arm, and ran towards the sofa. Theresa, helpless, was about to waken Agatha that she might save herself, when Gilbert darted past her, seized the little man in his arms, and carried him off to the study. Agatha still slept. Theresa closed the door of the room behind her softly. She clasped her hands in doubt and agony, looking to Gilbert for sympathy and to share her trouble; but he came out of the study supporting himself by the wall, and she gazed at his face at first in vague amazement.

‘Has he been like that before? Why do you let him go near her, he will kill her, — he will kill her!’ His cheeks were red, and that hot bar streaked his forehead: she had not thought it possible that he could look so angry, so terribly angry.

‘But, Gilbert, do you accuse me — you?’ moaned Theresa in her loneliness. ‘He has been excited, of course, nothing more. He has never been like that — he is as sane as you or I,’ she added fiercely; and then she cried, ‘What am I to do, what am I to do?’

Gilbert did not speak; he leant against the wall for support, and she realized again the girdle of silence that bound him about.

‘I am talking nonsense, — it is not safe, — I must do something at once; but oh, I assure you, he means nothing by it, it is only the excitement

that takes him when he has worked too hard. You know, he is so gentle, he would never hurt a fly — meaningly.'

'I will try to let her see — to make her understand — now, to-morrow, sometime soon, yes, it must be sometime soon,' Gilbert said at last.

Theresa took his hand in silent thanks. 'God grant that you will be successful,' was all she said.

Gilbert hesitated a moment; he would like to have said to her brutally, 'I am not doing it for your sake;' but he turned and went away in silence.

Out in the garden, under the shade of the trees, Ella was sitting, his peaceful, placid wife. He went to her with a longing for her soothing, calming company, loving her unconsciously, and without passion.

'Let us go for a walk,' he said hurriedly. 'Let us get away. Are you ready?'

'Yes,' she answered at once, noticing his nervous fidgeting.

'Dolphus!' she called, and their dog ran to them leaping and bounding at the prospect of a run.

Ordinarily, when they went out they dawdled, picking flowers and ferns, and Gilbert told his wife about the insect life of the woods; the snails, the butterflies, the mask-like wood-lice that he remembered at Campagne Salève. But to-day he paced along so fast, that after a while she was obliged to stop him.

'Gilbert, remember that we have to go back, dear. Let us sit here and rest a moment.'

‘I am tiring you, why did you not say so before?’ He flung himself down on the dry grass, and Dolphus immediately rollicked towards him, and sat on the top of him. Warm, silky, loving dog! The sun was warm too; everything was about him that makes life pleasant.

‘Ella,’ he said suddenly. ‘You have not the faintest idea how good you are.’

She smiled indulgently at him.

‘How can you put up with me? You never complain, lately you have never complained, and I — you ought to.’

‘Why?’ she said simply. ‘I love you and I am your wife.’

‘I wish,’ he went on after a pause, with a sudden unreasoning anger, ‘I wish you were not so grandly simple! It makes me feel ——’ As usual, he relapsed into silence and did not say aloud what he thought.

‘I am afraid,’ said Ella, not attempting to understand him, ‘that the air here does not agree with you.’

At that he laughed, and she wished that he would not laugh — that way.

‘No, perhaps not . . . but it does n’t matter. It’s not for long.’

‘No, only another week, and I am sure you would be better quite abroad.’

‘Yes.’

They turned to go back, and they saw from afar the little brown house, nestling among its trees.

‘ One could n’t find a quieter, prettier place,’ said Ella.

Agatha was sitting in there alone; Gilbert could see her through the window. He paused to look, and looked so long, that, becoming conscious of his gaze, she raised her eyes.

‘ Oh,’ he said hastily, ‘ I was just passing by,’ and he stayed.

‘ I promised Theresa,’ he told himself, ‘ I am only here for that purpose — that is all,’ and he walked in at the window.

‘ Another lovely day,’ he began, and talked pleasantly about the weather. He walked about the room while he spoke, and looked out at the bright, sunny garden beyond. How long would it be before he was out there again? Not until he had deliberately infused his gentle little poison, until he had destroyed her sublime happiness. He would make her know what it was to suffer, she, too, should feel the anguish of it — he laughed, and he sat down beside her.

‘ What is this?’ he asked taking up a sketch that lay on the table close by. ‘ Is it yours?’

‘ Oh no, it is an old, old sketch of Lester’s. Look at the date, he can only have been twelve.’

‘ I never heard of his painting then.’

‘ No, we never heard anything of him.’

‘ He always was peculiar.’

‘ No one ever understood him.’

‘ No, no one does, and that is why he makes those around him so unhappy.’

He was coming along very gently and she helped him. He clutched the arms of his chair; why, after all, should he talk to her of Lester — what had Lester to do with him? Nothing, nothing! Why was she not looking at him, and why was she so little disturbed? And was she not more exquisitely beautiful than ever she had been?

‘Yes,’ he said viciously. ‘He is a great genius, but he has not any of the ordinary feelings of man. He is quite devoid of — all things outside his talent.’

He waited; but she did not even think it worth her while to disagree. Did she understand? Why would she not look at him? Were his words in her ears so insignificant?

‘You know,’ he said leaning forward, ‘Theresa — the doctors — fear for his brain.’

Now at last she looked at him, and yes, oh yes, she was beginning to understand. But how she looked at him; with what a superb anger — no, an unbelief.

‘I love him,’ she said.

Gilbert leant still further forward, a hideous grin clutching at the corners of his mouth, and he put out a hand to touch her.

‘He is mad,’ he muttered slowly, distinctly. ‘And he has tried to kill ——’ She withdrew from him, glancing at him with a cold dislike — oh, why did she look at him like that? ‘Agatha! Agatha! oh, believe me, I am telling you the truth — you are mistaken — he is not worthy of you, — do not think of him for he is ——’

Agatha sat still, amazed. 'Has she no feeling?' he thought desperately.

'O great God!' he cried to her. 'He is a monster, he is mad — mad — he does not love you!'

He took her hand tightly in his; his flushed face quivered and his great eyes glared at her.

'Yes!' he shouted. 'I — *I* love you — oh!' and he remained with his mouth open, his tongue clacking against his teeth.

She wrenched her hand from him and stood up; her nostrils dilated and her paleness grew more intense, even that light hair seemed to turn gray.

'*You!*' she said. He told her that Lester was a monster, this man, and he had left his wife and come to her, knelt before her, and told her that he loved her. — '*You!*' she said.

Gilbert looked up at her, and gradually he realized what he had done and he laughed a little.

'Yes,' he answered, looking at her still. 'I!'

'You said that Lester does not know what he is doing, — you say he does not love me, and you lie, you lie! You dare to tell me that you love me, — you come to insult me, *You!*'

Gilbert grovelled under this '*You!*' Never, never, had he conceived anything like it — the utter scorn, the deep, cutting, killing scorn of it.

She stood another moment before him, swaying a little, looking beyond him.

'Lester! I will ask him, — he who is so pure, so exalted above the world and its littleness. I

will ask him.' She turned away with a confident smile. 'And I know, — oh, I know what he will say. You abuse him because he is so infinitely above you, — no, you cannot understand, — you do not know the greatness of him; he loves me as you cannot understand. But I will ask him.'

She went away, and Gilbert knelt on the ground where she left him. Suddenly he realized that he was alone, and that she had gone. . . . He rose, and he walked out through the window; yes, he was going out at the window into the bright, sunny garden beyond. Ella saw him go and wondered that he did not call her as usual. But he passed out through the gate alone.

In the afternoon he was coming back along the edge of the cliffs, and he looked out over the wide expanse of glittering blue sea that was tickled by the vigorous breeze into little rippling waves that sent a checkered net-work of dancing light over the face of it. Blue was the sea, tossing up frills of white foam round the rocks; chattering and laughing with the pebbles over the secrets of its quicksands. Gilbert stood on the long nose of the cliff that ran out to the Point, listening, looking, for is not the world very fair to look upon in spring?

He looked, and his eye was riveted on the white sail of a boat that appeared close below him round the end of the bay. It was coming slowly home to its moorings, sailing gently before the breeze, dipping like a sea-gull into the water. He watched it, for he knew it well, and he saw its

occupants; he watched it, this little boat moving more and more slowly, for Lester, it was evident, was paying no attention to his sails. He started forward to the very edge, unconscious that there was an edge — what did it matter? The big, kind sun shone full on him as he stood there, on his lined, flushed face, his straining, glaring eyes — no, it was not a kind sun that shone on him without the mercy of a shadow.

The woman in the boat stood up; he could hear that she was speaking, speaking very loud, and he saw her fling out her arms in supplication before the little, motionless figure at the tiller.

‘Agatha! Agatha!’ he cried. He knew that she was asking for her answer. He — he! — stood by and looked on, he saw her spurned, repulsed; *he* could give her an answer — O God! a very complete answer. ‘Agatha! Agatha!’

She stood up again, and then he saw her at the side of the boat.

She turned once more, again she spoke, and still the figure sat motionless at the tiller.

Then — the water spread itself in broadening, grinning wrinkles round about.

A cry, terrible, triumphant, rang through the air and was echoed mockingly among the rocks, and with a great jump he sprang from the cliff into the deep, smiling sea below.

‘Agatha!’

Lester heard, but still he sat, his eyes wide open, gazing. . . . A hand clutched at the edge of the boat, and for a moment a pale face,

despairing, searching, unutterably forsaken, looked up at him. . . .

His eyes suddenly sparkled and he rose with nervous energy, directing the boat to its mooring. He was going to call for help? He was going for aid?

The sea smiling over the secret of its quick-sands, rippled in to the shore.

Lester came into the room where Theresa sat. Looking up she saw his face.

‘Where is she?’ she whispered fearfully.

He gazed at her, a triumphant smile on his lips, his eyes glistening.

‘Theresa!’ he cried, embracing her fondly, ‘I have found it,— I have seen it — now I know,— Oh, I know!’

He ran away to the studio and locked the door.

A picture was exhibited next year which created a great sensation. One read that it was the greatest attainment of Lester’s genius, and it was admired, discussed, denounced. No other picture of his was ever shown, and his house in London was empty, and then it was rumored that he had fallen over on the other side, that is no longer genius. . . .

The name of the picture was ‘Despair.’

THE KEYNOTES SERIES.

16mo. Cloth. Each volume with a Titlepage and
Cover Design by Aubrey Beardsley.

Price \$1.00.

- I. **KEYNOTES.** By GEORGE EGERTON.
 - II. **THE DANCING FAUN.** By FLORENCE FARR.
 - III. **POOR FOLK.** By FEDOR DOSTOIEVSKY. Translated from the
Russian by LENA MILMAN. With an Introduction by GEORGE
MOORE.
 - IV. **A CHILD OF THE AGE.** By FRANCIS ADAMS.
 - V. **THE GREAT GOD PAN AND THE INMOST LIGHT.** By
ARTHUR MACHEN.
 - VI. **DISCORDS.** By GEORGE EGERTON.
 - VII. **PRINCE ZALESKI.** By M. P. SHIEL.
 - VIII. **THE WOMAN WHO DID.** By GRANT ALLEN.
 - IX. **WOMEN'S TRAGEDIES.** By H. D. LOWRY.
 - X. **GREY ROSES AND OTHER STORIES.** By HENRY HARLAND
 - XI. **AT THE FIRST CORNER AND OTHER STORIES.** By H.
B. MARRIOTT WATSON.
 - XII. **MONOCHROMES.** By ELLA D'ARCY.
 - XIII. **AT THE RELTON ARMS.** By EVELYN SHARP.
 - XIV. **THE GIRL FROM THE FARM.** By GERTRUDE DIX.
 - XV. **THE MIRROR OF MUSIC.** By STANLEY V. MAKOWER.
 - XVI. **YELLOW AND WHITE.** By W. CARLTON DAWE.
 - XVII. **THE MOUNTAIN LOVERS.** By FIONA MACLEOD.
 - XVIII. **THE WOMAN WHO DID NOT.** By VICTORIA CROSSE.
 - XIX. **THE THREE IMPOSTORS.** By ARTHUR MACHEN.
 - XX. **NOBODY'S FAULT.** By NETTA SYRETT.
 - XXI. **PLATONIC AFFECTIONS.** By JOHN SMITH.
 - XXII. **IN HOMESPUN.** By E. NESBIT.
 - XXIII. **NETS FOR THE WIND.** By UNA A. TAYLOR.
 - XXIV. **WHERE THE ATLANTIC MEETS THE LAND.** By CALD-
WELL LIPSETT.
-

*Sold by all Booksellers. Mailed, postpaid, on receipt of price,
by the Publishers,*

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON, MASS.

John Lane, The Bodley Head, Vigo Street, London, W.

Messrs. Roberts Brothers' Publications.

PRINCE ZALESKI.

BY M. P. SHIEL.

Keynotes Series. American Copyright Edition.
16mo. Cloth. Price, \$1.00.

The three stories by M. P. Shiel, which have just been published in the Keynotes series, make one of the most remarkable books of the time. Prince Zaleski, who figures in each, is a striking character, most artistically and dramatically presented. "The Race of Orven," the first story, is one of great power, and it were hardly possible to tell it more skilfully. "The Stone of the Edmundsbury Monks" is in something the same vein, mysterious and gruesome. It is in "S. S.," however, that the author most fully discloses his marvellous power as a story-teller. We have read nothing like it since the tales of E. A. Poe; but it is not an imitation of Poe. We much doubt if the latter ever wrote a story so strong and thrillingly dramatic. — *Boston Advertiser.*

The first of the three tales composing this little volume is entitled "The Race of Orven," which supplies the character from whom is taken the title of the book. The other two are, "The Stone of the Edmundsbury Monks" and "The S. S." There are three maxims on the titlepage, probably one for each of the tales, — one from Isaiah, one from Cervantes, and one from Sophocles, — but they are a triple key to the spirit of book altogether. The Prince, however, rules the contents entirely, pervading them with mysticism of every imaginable character. The "S. S." tale is decidedly after the manner of Poe, full of mysterious problems in murders and suicides, to be treated with ingenious solutions. There is a morbid tendency running through the entire trinity, the author seeming to invent characters and complications only to exhibit his ingenuity in unravelling them, and in stringing on these ingenious theories the spiritual conceptions in which he is wont to indulge his thought. But the thought is both magnetic and bold, and rarely illusive. Hermitages, recluses, silences and funereal glooms, and the entire family of grotesque thoughts and things, are not merely wrought into the writer's canvas, but are his very staple, the warp and woof composing it. It is an across-the-seas collection of conceits, skilfully strung on one glittering thread by a matured thinker. The attempt is made to carve out the mystery of things from the heart of the outward existence. The men and women on whom the scalpel is made to work are real flesh-and-blood entities, of such strong points of character as to be actually necessary in developing the author's thought as much as his purpose. The book belongs to the increasing class that has come in with the introversive habit of modern thought and speculation — call it spiritual or something else. — *Boston Courier.*

Sold by all Booksellers. Mailed, postpaid, on receipt of price, by the Publishers,

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON, MASS.

KEYNOTES.

A Volume of Stories.

By GEORGE EGERTON. With titlepage by AUBREY
BEARDSLEY. 16mo. Cloth. Price, \$1.00.

Not since "The Story of an African Farm" was written has any woman delivered herself of so strong, so forcible a book. — *Queen*.

Knotty questions in sex problems are dealt with in these brief sketches. They are treated boldly, fearlessly, perhaps we may say forcefully, with a deep plunge into the realities of life. The colors are laid in masses on the canvas, while passions, temperaments, and sudden, subtle analyses take form under the quick, sharp stroke. Though they contain a vein of coarseness and touch slightly upon tabooed subjects, they evidence power and thought. — *Public Opinion*.

Indeed, we do not hesitate to say that "Keynotes" is the strongest volume of short stories that the year has produced. Further, we would wager a good deal, were it necessary, that George Egerton is a nom-de-plume, and of a woman, too. Why is it that so many women hide beneath a man's name when they enter the field of authorship? And in this case it seems doubly foolish, the work is so intensely strong. . . .

The chief characters of these stories are women, and women drawn as only a woman can draw word-pictures of her own sex. The subtlety of analysis is wonderful, direct in its effectiveness, unerring in its truth, and stirring in its revealing power. Truly, no one but a woman could thus throw the light of revelation upon her own sex. Man does not understand woman as does the author of "Keynotes."

The vitality of the stories, too, is remarkable. Life, very real life, is pictured; life full of joys and sorrows, happinesses and heartbreaks, courage and self-sacrifice; of self-abnegation, of struggle, of victory. The characters are intense, yet not overdrawn; the experiences are dramatic, in one sense or another, and yet are never hyper-emotional. And all is told with a power of concentration that is simply astonishing. A sentence does duty for a chapter, a paragraph for a picture of years of experience.

Indeed, for vigor, originality, forcefulness of expression, and completeness of character presentation, "Keynotes" surpasses any recent volume of short fiction that we can recall. — *Times*, Boston.

It brings a new quality and a striking new force into the literature of the hour. — *The Speaker*.

The mind that conceived "Keynotes" is so strong and original that one will look with deep interest for the successors of this first book, at once powerful and appealingly feminine. — *Irish Independent*.

*Sold by all booksellers. Mailed, post-paid, on receipt
of price by the Publishers,*

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON, MASS.

THE DANCING FAUN.

BY FLORENCE FARR.

With Title-page and Cover Design by Aubrey Beardsley.

16mo. Cloth. Price, \$1.00.

We welcome the light and merry pen of Miss Farr as one of the deftest that has been wielded in the style of to-day. She has written the cleverest and the most cynical sensation story of the season. — *Liverpool Daily Post*.

Slight as it is, the story is, in its way, strong. — *Literary World*.

Full of bright paradox, and paradox which is no mere topsy-turvy play upon words, but the product of serious thinking upon life. One of the cleverest of recent novels. — *Star*.

It is full of epigrammatic effects, and it has a certain thread of pathos calculated to win our sympathy. — *Queen*.

The story is subtle and psychological after the fashion of modern psychology; it is undeniably clever and smartly written. — *Gentlewoman*.

No one can deny its freshness and wit. Indeed there are things in it here and there which John Oliver Hobbes herself might have signed without loss of reputation. — *Woman*.

There is a lurid power in the very unreality of the story. One does not quite understand how Lady Geraldine worked herself up to shooting her lover; but when she has done it, the description of what passes through her mind is magnificent. — *Athenæum*.

Written by an obviously clever woman. — *Black and White*.

Miss Farr has talent. "The Dancing Faun" contains writing that is distinctively good. Doubtless it is only a prelude to something much stronger. — *Academy*.

As a work of art, the book has the merit of brevity and smart writing, while the *dénouement* is skilfully prepared, and comes as a surprise. If the book had been intended as a satire on the "new woman" sort of literature, it would have been most brilliant; but assuming it to be written in earnest, we can heartily praise the form of its construction without agreeing with the sentiments expressed. *St. James's Gazette*.

Shows considerable power and aptitude. — *Saturday Review*.

Miss Farr is a clever writer whose apprenticeship at playwriting can easily be detected in the epigrammatic conversations with which this book is filled, and whose characters expound a philosophy of life which strongly recalls Oscar Wilde's later interpretations. . . . The theme of the tale is heredity developed in a most unpleasant manner. The leading idea that daughters inherit the father's qualities, good or evil, while sons resemble their mother, is well sustained. — *Home Journal*.

Sold everywhere. Postpaid by publishers.

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON.

A CHILD OF THE AGE.

A Nobel.

BY FRANCIS ADAMS

(KEYNOTES SERIES.)

With titlepage by AUBREY BEARDSLEY. 16mo. Cloth.
Price, \$1.00.

This story by Francis Adams was originally published under the title of "Leicester, an Autobiography," in 1884, when the author was only twenty-two years of age. That would make him thirty-two years old now, if he were still living. He was but eighteen years old when it was first drafted by him. Sometime after publication, he revised the work, and in its present form it is now published again, practically a posthumous production. We can with truthfulness characterize it as a tale of fresh originality, deep spiritual meaning, and exceptional power. It fairly buds, blossoms, and fruits with suggestions that search the human spirit through. No similar production has come from the hand of any author in our time. That Francis Adams would have carved out a remarkable career for himself had he continued to live, this little volume, all compact with significant suggestion, attests on many a page. It exalts, inspires, comforts, and strengthens all together. It instructs by suggestion, spiritualizes the thought by its elevating and purifying narrative, and feeds the hungering spirit with food it is only too ready to accept and assimilate. Those who read its pages with an eager curiosity the first time will be pretty sure to return to them for a second slower and more meditative perusal. The book is assuredly the promise and potency of great things unattained in the too brief lifetime of its gifted author. We heartily commend it as a book not only of remarkable power, but as the product of a human spirit whose merely intellectual gifts were but a fractional part of his inclusive spiritual endowments. — *Boston Courier*.

But it is a remarkable work — as a pathological study almost unsurpassed. It produces the impression of a photograph from life, so vividly realistic is the treatment. To this result the author's style, with its fidelity of microscopic detail, doubtless contributes. — *Evening Traveller*.

This story by Francis Adams is one to read slowly, and then to read a second time. It is powerfully written, full of strong suggestion, unlike, in fact, anything we have recently read. What he would have done in the way of literary creation, had he lived, is, of course, only a matter of conjecture. What he did we have before us in this remarkable book. — *Boston Advertiser*.

Sold by all Booksellers. Mailed by the Publishers,

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON, MASS.

DISCORDS.

A Volume of Stories.

By GEORGE EGERTON, author of "Keynotes."

AMERICAN COPYRIGHT EDITION.

16mo. Cloth. Price, \$1.00.

George Egerton's new volume entitled "Discords," a collection of short stories, is more talked about, just now, than any other fiction of the day. The collection is really stories for story-writers. They are precisely the quality which literary folk will wrangle over. Harold Frederic cables from London to the "New York Times" that the book is making a profound impression there. It is published on both sides, the Roberts House bringing it out in Boston. George Egerton, like George Eliot and George Sand, is a woman's *nom de plume*. The extraordinary frankness with which life in general is discussed in these stories not unnaturally arrests attention. — *Lilian Whiting*.

The English woman, known as yet only by the name of George Egerton, who made something of a stir in the world by a volume of strong stories called "Keynotes," has brought out a new book under the rather uncomfortable title of "Discords." These stories show us pessimism run wild; the gloomy things that can happen to a human being are so dwelt upon as to leave the impression that in the author's own world there is no light. The relations of the sexes are treated of in bitter irony, which develops into actual horror as the pages pass. But in all this there is a rugged grandeur of style, a keen analysis of motive, and a deepness of pathos that stamp George Egerton as one of the greatest women writers of the day. "Discords" has been called a volume of stories; it is a misnomer, for the book contains merely varying episodes in lives of men and women, with no plot, no beginning nor ending. — *Boston Traveller*.

This is a new volume of psychological stories from the pen and brains of George Egerton, the author of "Keynotes." Evidently the titles of the author's books are selected according to musical principles. The first story in the book is "A Psychological Moment at Three Periods." It is all strength rather than sentiment. The story of the child, of the girl, and of the woman is told, and told by one to whom the mysteries of the life of each are familiarly known. In their very truth, as the writer has so subtly analyzed her triple characters, they sadden one to think that such things must be; yet as they are real, they are bound to be disclosed by somebody and in due time. The author betrays remarkable penetrative skill and perception, and dissects the human heart with a power from whose demonstration the sensitive nature may instinctively shrink even while fascinated with the narration and hypnotized by the treatment exhibited. — *Courier*.

Sold by all Booksellers. Mailed by Publishers,

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON, MASS.

THE GREAT GOD PAN AND THE INMOST LIGHT.

BY ARTHUR MACHEN.

KEYNOTES SERIES.

16mo. Cloth. Price, \$1.00.

A couple of tales by Arthur Machen, presumably an Englishman, published æsthetically in this country by Roberts Brothers. They are horror stories, the horror being of the vague psychologic kind and dependent, in each case, upon a man of science who tries to effect a change in individual personality by an operation upon the brain cells. The implied lesson is that it is dangerous and unwise to seek to probe the mystery separating mind and matter. These sketches are extremely strong, and we guarantee the "shivers" to any one who reads them. — *Hartford Courant*.

For two stories of the most marvellous and improbable character, yet told with wonderful realism and naturalness, the palm for this time will have to be awarded to Arthur Machen, for "The Great God Pan and the Inmost Light," two stories just published in one book. They are fitting companions to the famous stories by Edgar Allan Poe both in matter and style. "The Great God Pan" is founded upon an experiment made upon a girl by which she was enabled for a moment to see the god Pan, but with most disastrous results, the most wonderful of which is revealed at the end of the story, and which solution the reader will eagerly seek to reach. From the first mystery or tragedy follow in rapid succession. "The Inmost Light" is equally as remarkable for its imaginative power and perfect air of probability. Anything in the legitimate line of psychology utterly pales before these stories of such plausibility. *Boston Home Journal*.

Precisely who the great god Pan of Mr. Machen's first tale is, we did not quite discover when we read it, or, discovering, we have forgotten; but our impression is that under the idea of that primitive great deity he impersonated, or meant to impersonate, the evil influences that attach to woman, the fatality of feminine beauty, which, like the countenance of the great god Pan, is deadly to all who behold it. His heroine is a beautiful woman, who ruins the souls and bodies of those over whom she casts her spells, being as good as a Suicide Club, if we may say so, to those who love her; and to whom she is Death. Something like this, if not this exactly, is, we take it, the interpretation of Mr. Machen's uncanny parable, which is too obscure to justify itself as an imaginative creation and too morbid to be the production of a healthy mind. The kind of writing which it illustrates is a bad one, and this is one of the worst of the kind. It is not terrible, but horrible. — *R. H. S. in Mail and Express*.

Sold by all Booksellers. Mailed by Publishers.

ROBERTS BROTHERS, BOSTON, MASS.

POOR FOLK.

A Novel.

Translated from the Russian of FEDOR DOSTOIEVSKY, by
LENA MILMAN, with decorative titlepage and a critical
introduction by GEORGE MOORE. American
Copyright edition.

16mo. Cloth. \$1.00.

A capable critic writes : " One of the most beautiful, touching stories I have read. The character of the old clerk is a masterpiece, a kind of Russian Charles Lamb. He reminds me, too, of Anatole France's ' Sylvestre Bonnard,' but it is a more poignant, moving figure. How wonderfully, too, the sad little strokes of humor are blended into the pathos in his characterization, and how fascinating all the naïve self-revelations of his poverty become, — all his many ups and downs and hopes and fears. His unsuccessful visit to the money-lender, his despair at the office, unexpectedly ending in a sudden burst of good fortune, the final despairing cry of his love for Varvara, — these hold one breathless. One can hardly read them without tears. . . . But there is no need to say all that could be said about the book. It is enough to say that it is over powerful and beautiful."

We are glad to welcome a good translation of the Russian Dostoievsky's story " Poor Folk," Englished by Lena Milman. It is a tale of unrequited love, conducted in the form of letters written between a poor clerk and his girl cousin whom he devotedly loves, and who finally leaves him to marry a man not admirable in character who, the reader feels, will not make her happy. The pathos of the book centres in the clerk, Makar's, unselfish affection and his heart-break at being left lonesome by his charming kinswoman whose epistles have been his one solace. In the conductment of the story, realistic sketches of middle class Russian life are given, heightening the effect of the denouement. George Moore writes a sparkling introduction to the book. — *Hartford Courant*.

Dostoievsky is a great artist. " Poor Folk " is a great novel. — *Boston Advertiser*.

It is a most beautiful and touching story, and will linger in the mind long after the book is closed. The pathos is blended with touching bits of humor, that are even pathetic in themselves. — *Boston Times*.

Notwithstanding that " Poor Folk " is told in that most exasperating and entirely unreal style — by letters — it is complete in sequence, and the interest does not flag as the various phases in the sordid life of the two characters are developed. The theme is intensely pathetic and truly human, while its treatment is exceedingly artistic. The translator, Lena Milman, seems to have well preserved the spirit of the original — *Cambridge Tribune*.

ROBERTS BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
BOSTON, MASS.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00021698623

